

Tube leasing plan hailed as triumph for Prescott

By Randeep Ramesh
Transport Correspondent

THE CASH-STARVED London Underground received a £365m boost yesterday as the Government announced it would lease its trains, track and stations to the private sector.

John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, stressed his plan was not privatisation, nor even "partial" privatisation, but

a new "third way" to provide LU with a 15-year, £7bn investment programme. The deal could see London's subterranean rail system broken up into three parts. At present, there are 12 Tube lines - seven of which are classified as "deep" and the rest as "sub-surface".

London Transport will remain a public-sector company responsible for "running the trains, managing the stations,

marketing the network and ensuring safety". Private firms will bid for the right to renew the network. The contractors will have to maintain the track, upgrade the rapidly-deteriorating signalling systems and modernise the rolling stock. LT will pay the infrastructure companies "service charges" to use the trains and tracks.

Railtrack, the company which took over British Rail's

stations and signalling, was quick to express an "interest". "Two-thirds of the Underground tracks are on the surface, overground, and many of them are adjacent to existing Railtrack assets," explained Brian Mellitt, the company's engineering director.

Mr Prescott said that those that offered "the best value for money" would win the work. Fares will, according to ministers,

"be the judgement of the Greater London Authority".

At present, ticket prices can rise by 1 per cent above inflation - an increase bitterly resented by Londoners.

Geoffrey Robinson, the Paymaster General, said the process of injecting private capital into the network could "start immediately". However, it is unlikely to trickle in until after 2000, when the London

mayor - who will be in charge of LT - should be in place.

The key to the Government's plan is the Tube's cash flow.

It takes £800m every year

in ticket sales and makes an "operating profit" of about £275m.

But this is after a Treasury handout of £400m. If the Government waits until 2001, the Tube's "profits" could replace its government subsidy.

Experts say that private con-

tractors could then be paid by a combination of "London taxes" such as congestion charging or parking levies and increasing fares. Either way, the improvements to the system will be paid for by its users.

Maurice Fitzpatrick, a partner with accountants Chantrey Vellacott, said the extra investment needed £400m more a year. "If that were all to come from ticket sales, fares

would have to be increased forthwith by around 50 per cent." Alternatively longer leases would see private companies paying for work in the first few years and receiving large dollops of cash in the latter half of the contract as LT becomes increasing profitable.

The radical plan is considered a triumph for Mr Prescott. He had battled to save the network from being privatised.

GEC to end role for Aitken

By Kathy Marks

GEC-Marconi, the defence company, is about to part company with Jonathan Aitken, the disgraced former cabinet minister whom it hired only a few weeks ago as a consultant on Saudi arms sales.

The company said yesterday that Mr Aitken, who was arrested this week in connection with perjury allegations, had been appointed on a short-term contract to handle a specific project which was almost complete.

It declined to comment on whether his prospects had been affected by the week's developments. However, a spokesman said: "GEC's reputation is squeaky clean. As a transnational company, we have to behave as straightforwardly as possible always, because our success depends on our reputation."

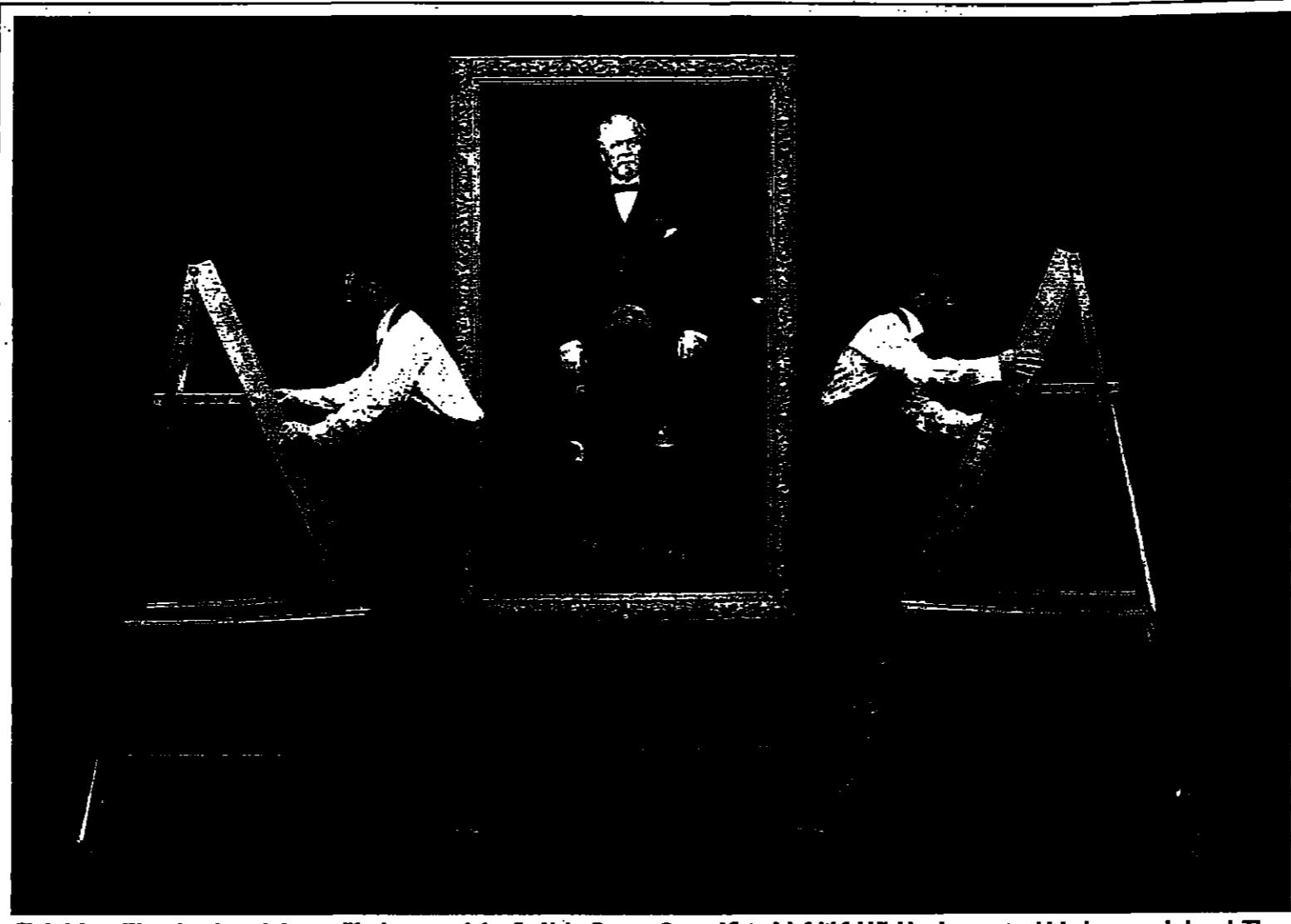
Mr Aitken was questioned by police for four hours on Tuesday about allegations arising from the collapse of his libel action last year against *The Guardian* and Granada Television. His teenage daughter, Victoria, who would have testified on his behalf, was interviewed the previous day.

Although his appointment was confirmed by GEC only three weeks ago, it is understood he has been working for it for several months. He is believed to have been advising it on its attempts to sell the Marksman radar-targeted artillery gun.

Sources say the project is only weeks from completion and that there was never an intention to retain Mr Aitken for further consultancy work. But they acknowledge that the latest legal developments have made him a source of potential embarrassment to the company.

One source said: "Clearly it was believed that this was a man who would bring something to the picnic as far as Saudi Arabia was concerned, and if you are trying to get business, you explore every avenue."

Mr Aitken, 35, a former defence procurement minister, has been credited with securing a £5bn order for British Aerospace for 48 Tornado fighter-bombers from Saudi Arabia.



Christie's staff hanging the only known life-size portrait in oil of John Brown, Queen Victoria's faithful Highland servant, which she commissioned. The painting by Carl Rudolph Sohn is to be sold on behalf of the Scottish Tartans Society at Christie's in Edinburgh in May

Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

Sporting chance: who screens what

FROM FRONT-PAGE

Recommendations of the independent working party on which sports should be screened free by terrestrial channels (Group A) and those which are open to bids from satellite and cable companies (Group B):

Group A (Full Live Coverage Protected)
Olympic Games Fifa World Cup Finals (final, semi-finals and matches involving Home Nations); European Football Championships (final, semi-finals and matches involving home nations); FA Cup Final, Scottish FA Cup Final (in Scotland); Wimbledon (final weekend); the Grand National; the Derby.

Group B (Secondary Coverage Protected)
Fifa World Cup Finals (all matches not included above); European Football Championships (all matches not included above); Fifa World Cup qualifying matches involving home nations; European Football Championships qualifying matches involving home nations; Five Nations Rugby Tournament; Rugby World Cup (final, semi-finals and matches involving home nations); Test Matches involving England; Cricket World Cup (final, semi-finals and matches involving home nations); Wimbledon (all play other than finals weekend); Commonwealth Games; world athletics championship; and for golf - the Open and the Ryder Cup.

Doctor suspended in parental consent case

By Clare Garner

A CONSULTANT who carried out a heart procedure on a six-year-old girl without the consent of her parents was last night suspended for six months.

James Taylor, a consultant paediatric cardiologist at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital, was found guilty of serious professional misconduct at the end of a four-day hearing at the General Medical Council (GMC).

A six-month suspension is a lenient sentence after a finding of serious professional misconduct. It reflects the GMC's view that Dr Taylor acted in what he felt were the best interests of the child, but that he ignored his overriding duty to obtain parental consent.

Debbie Jenkins, from Sprowston, Norwich, died after suffering irreversible brain damage following Dr Taylor's procedure. Her parents, Ross and Carolyn, said they

had not wanted the procedure - the insertion of a balloon catheter - to go ahead.

The GMC found that Dr Taylor, 61, had not been aware of Debbie's parents' wishes and found that he did not have "sufficient medical grounds to proceed in the absence of parental consent".

Debbie was born with a congenital heart condition and was supposed to be undergoing a routine diagnostic procedure to establish if her health problems were cardiac-related.

Dr Taylor told the hearing that he decided to go ahead with a procedure to dilate a balloon in an effort to enlarge a narrowed artery in July 1995. After the balloon burst Dr Taylor attempted to remove the remnants of the device for three hours but he failed and it cut off the blood supply to Debbie's brain.

Dr Herber Duthie, chairman of the Professional Conduct Committee of the GMC, said there had

been no exceptional circumstances in the case. He said that parents had a right to be involved in the care of their children, "so doctors must do their best to explain what is involved and gain their consent".

The decision to use the balloon catheter was taken without the parent's consent." Dr Taylor's suspension will apply after a 28-day appeal procedure. Both parents were devastated by the death of their only daughter and Mr Jenkins said that he still cries himself to sleep. They were too distressed to speak about yesterday's decision.

Dr Taylor's lawyer, Nicola Davies, told the hearing that he had believed he was acting in the best interests of his patient when he carried out the procedure. "He is a man of total dedication and a wise physician," she said. "He was devastated by the death of Debbie Jenkins."



British Isles weather

London: Slight rain. Scotland: Sun, some cloud.

Edinburgh: Slight rain. Belfast: Slight rain.

Cardiff: Slight rain. Dublin: Slight rain.

Wales: Slight rain. Northern Ireland: Slight rain.

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Parliament kept out in double blow for Glasgow

By Kim Sengupta

ONE CAN imagine the howls of outrage down Sauchiehall Street. In a day of a double whammy, Glasgow lost the initial hosting of the Scottish Parliament to Edinburgh, and then lost its bid for money to establish a National Gallery of Scottish Art and Design.

The first blow came from Donald Dewar, Secretary of State for Scotland. Glasgow, which had promised a "bare-knuckle fight" to be the first home of the nation's first parliament in 300 years, was told it had lost the battle to the old rival Edinburgh, traditionally viewed as the city of the "establishment".

Then came the news that the Heritage Lottery Fund had turned down the £1.85m grant application for the gallery.

The Government had from the outset shown a preference for Edinburgh to site the new parliament from its inception. That was confirmed yesterday despite an offer from Glasgow to house it in the Charlemont Cross building formerly used by Strathclyde Regional Council.

Mr Dewar said: "The Glasgow option ... was very attractive. It offered a suitable debating chamber and ample office accommodation nearby. I am very grateful to the Glasgow Council." However, he continued: "A decisive factor was the need for the Parliament to put down roots in the vitally important early years.

"It would have been difficult for the Parliament and its staff established in Glasgow for the first two years to face a move to Edinburgh. That would be hard on businesses and other organisations seeking to establish a presence near to the Parliament."

The Glasgow option had been expected to cost just £5m, and Edinburgh would be more expensive. But Mr Dewar said that was almost

entirely because rates were higher there.

Asked if he expected the people of Glasgow to be bitter about the decision, the Secretary of State responded: "In a competition between sites there is always going to be a measure of disappointment. I hope they will not imagine that this was some kind of stitch-up to deny them."

But the Scottish Nationalist Party leader Alex Salmond claimed it indeed was a stitch-up. "It looks as though Glasgow was used as a pawn in order to get a better bid from Edinburgh," he said. "It's a shabby way to treat Glasgow and leaves a bad taste in the mouth."

Mr Salmond added that the dispute between the two cities could have been avoided by placing the Parliament in Calton Hill, the favoured location of traditionalists.

Glasgow officials were aggrieved but sought to stay on the moral high ground. A City Council spokesman said: "We are proud of the case we made for Glasgow and believe that on quality and cost it was the best bid. Obviously we are disappointed the Secretary of State did not feel able to agree with us."

Edinburgh City Council members felt the natural order of things had been maintained. The Lord Provost, Eric Milligan, said: "This is a recognition that Edinburgh is the natural home of the Parliament and that it must meet here from the very beginning."

Timothy Clifford, director of the National Galleries of Scotland, noted the Lottery Fund's rejection of the Scottish Art and Design project came in the midst of focus on nationhood with the Scottish Parliament in the news. "It is an irony that with a Parliament about to sit in Scotland again, and with Scotland so conscious of nationhood, the concept of a Scottish gallery has been rejected."

She was told in a letter from PFA Chief Executive Gordon Taylor: "The PFA Awards Dinner has been a men-only evening for the 25 years



Net loss: Rachel Anderson, who has been refused entry to a players' award ceremony because of her sex

Photograph: Tom Pilston

Female football agent ruled offside

By Rosa Prince

THE ONLY female football agent in England is being refused entry to the players' award ceremony because she is a woman.

Rachel Anderson, 40, was last year turned away at the door from the Professional Football Association's award ceremony, which is held at a London hotel.

When she was invited to this year's ceremony, which takes place on 5 April, by the West Ham player Julian Dicks, she and Mr Dicks contacted the PFA in advance to make sure the same thing would not happen.

She was told in a letter from PFA Chief Executive Gordon Taylor: "The PFA Awards Dinner has been a men-only evening for the 25 years

since its inception and the PFA Management Committee have made a decision that it should remain so."

Ms Hunter, a respected Football Association licensed agent, represents 27 footballers, including Mr Dicks, Sheffield United player Don Hutchinson and Michael Hughes, who is also at West Ham. In her seven years working in football Ms Hunter said this is the only time she has encountered sexism.

The Professional Football Association is a trade union for past and present professional footballers, and is affiliated to the TUC. Their annual dinner includes an award bestowed by the players themselves, and is considered the most prestigious accolade a footballer can receive.

At last year's ceremony Ms

Hunter was turned away when her ticket was checked by Brendan Batson, Deputy Chief Executive at the PFA.

Ms Hunter said: "He came up to me and said: 'There seems to have been some mistake. You can't come in, it's men only'."

When Ms Hunter asked Mr Batson, who is black, how he would feel if he were turned away on the grounds of his race, he replied: "It is not the same issue at all."

When Mr Dicks wrote to the PFA saying he was showing them a yellow card for their treatment of Ms Hunter, he was told by Mr Taylor: "Wherever possible we attempt to be progressive. I do not consider the policy of the Management Committee on this matter to be regressive ... As a matter of fact you are

the only one of our members who has written to ask a female guest to accompany them in 25 years."

The PFA told Ms Hunter they would end their men-only rule once women became members of the Association. However, this is unlikely to happen in the near future, as the PFA represents professional players and the women's game in this country remains amateur.

Katherine Knight of the FA said the Association was fully committed to the participation of women in football as spectators, players and administrators. She said: "The PFA's treatment of Rachel Anderson does seem to go against the general trend in the football in the way women are being viewed."

The PFA did not return several telephone calls.

Lawrence inquiry set to resume

THE INQUIRY into the 1993 racist murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in south-east London is to resume on Tuesday.

The hearing was postponed minutes after it began last Monday when the Lawrence family's legal team raised "very legitimate concerns" over a newspaper article accusing the inquiry chairman, Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, of racial insensitivity.

However, after "assurances" by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, who "reaffirmed" his "complete confidence" in Sir William, the Lawrences decided to continue to take part in the inquiry.

MS man not guilty

A MAN with multiple sclerosis who killed a woman and injured four pedestrians when his car careered out of control was yesterday found not guilty of causing death by dangerous driving by reason of insanity. Reginald Full, 46, of Shotesbury, Norfolk, lost control of his Ford Fiesta in the centre of Norwich in December 1996.

Bank bomb

A BOMB was lobbed into a crowded bank building by republicans in the centre of Londonderry yesterday. The device, contained in a holdall, was thrown into the bank by members of the breakaway Continuity IRA. No one was hurt in the attack.

Range Rover recall

Rover is to recall 15,700 Range Rover Classic and Land Rover Discovery vehicles because of an airbag problem, it was announced yesterday. Four cases have been reported in America of the driver's airbag inflating unnecessarily, although no accidents resulted.

MPs go green

MPs are to be given a special bicycle allowance in a move seen as a boost to the battle on traffic pollution. From 1 April, they will get a 6.2p per mile payment while on Commons business.

Meanwhile, the Queen is backing the drive for cleaner air - by ordering that four of the Royal Mews cars should be converted to run on liquid petroleum gas.

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Parents reassured flying does not kill babies

By Jeremy Laurence
Health Editor

PARENTS planning to take young babies on long-haul flights were advised not to worry yesterday after research suggested some infants could be at risk of cot death from the reduced oxygen levels in the cabin.

Experts said that flying appeared to be safe in the first year of life although it was probably wise to wait a week after birth to ensure the infant was healthy.

They were responding to findings from a study of 34 infants who were exposed to air containing 6 per cent less oxygen than normal, similar to that in an aircraft cabin or up a mountain. The babies were carefully monitored and four suffered a fall in oxygen levels in their blood associated with disturbed heart rhythms and shortness of breath. They were given extra oxygen immediately.

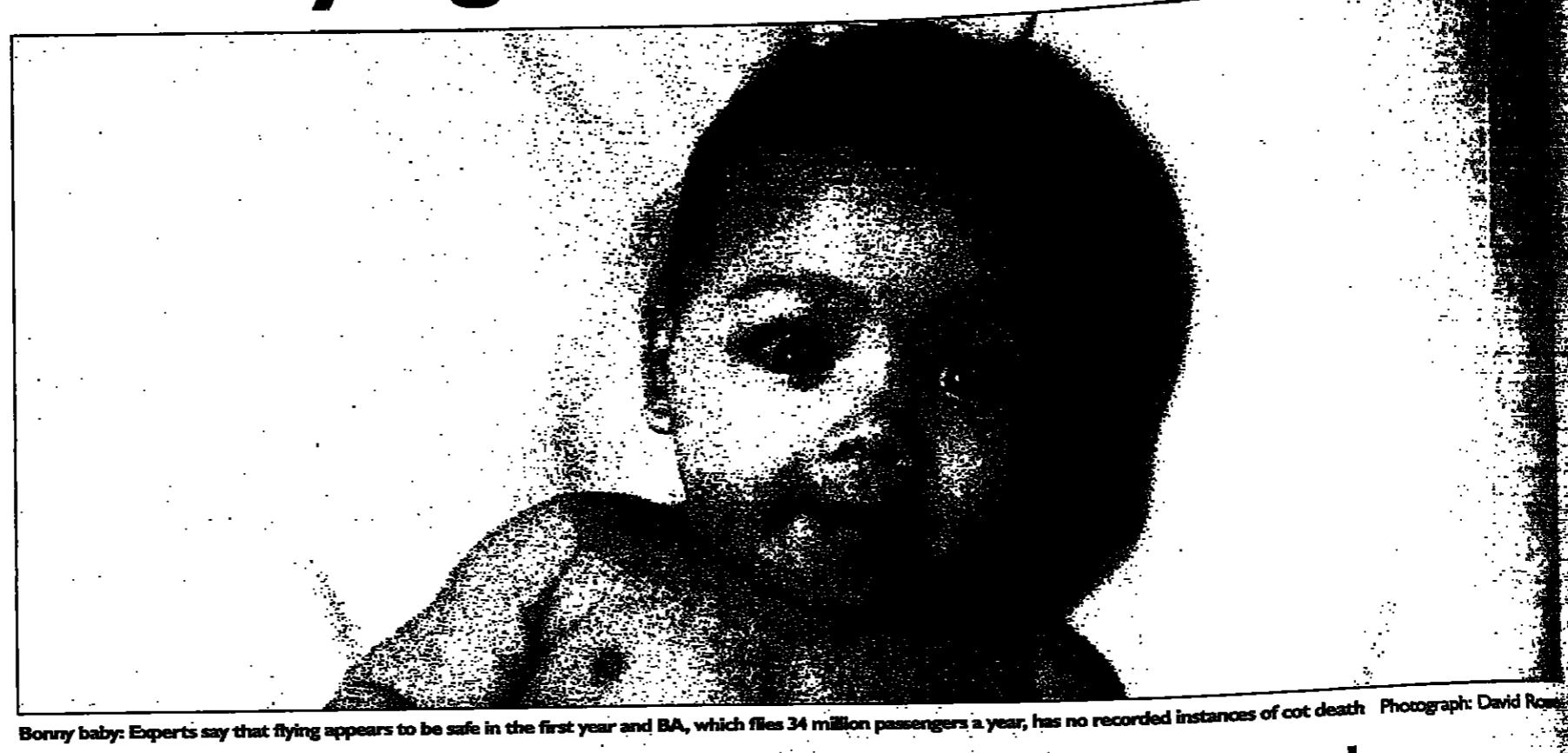
The study, by Professor David Southall and colleagues from the North Staffordshire Hospital Centre, in Stoke-on-Trent, published in the *British Medical Journal*, was carried out after two sets of parents seen at the hospital reported losing a child to cot

death after a long-haul flight. Yesterday, Anne Diamond, the television presenter who has played prominent role in cot death campaigns, disclosed that her own baby son died two days after a flight.

In an editorial in the *BMJ*, Anthony Milner, professor of neonatology at St Thomas' Hospital, London, said the findings needed to be put in context. British Airways, which flies more than 34 million passengers a year, says there have been no recorded instances of cot deaths during a flight in the past 10 years.

Professor Milner said the physiological effects of breathing low levels of oxygen on infants had been carefully studied, but these did not necessarily mean they were at greater risk. "All the epidemiological evidence indicates that... flying appears to be safe in the first year of life."

The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths said: "The study did not demonstrate a greater cot death risk on an aeroplane than on the ground. It tells us that some babies react more dramatically than others to a drop in oxygen and this is an interesting finding which needs to be pursued in further research."



Bonny baby: Experts say that flying appears to be safe in the first year and BA, which flies 34 million passengers a year, has no recorded instances of cot death. Photograph: David Rose

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If you tell your
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When you have a problem, it's the most natural thing in the world to want to talk it through with someone.

Sometimes, though, this creates another problem: who's the best person to confide in?

An obvious choice would be a close friend. But let's face it, we don't always choose our friends for their amazing powers of tact, diplomacy and discretion. Tell one person, and you may end up telling the world.

You may be lucky enough to be able to talk to someone in your family. Then again, you may be one of the large number of people who find talking to your nearest and dearest agonisingly embarrassing.

A girlfriend or boyfriend? If you can, great. But sometimes we don't want to expose our weaknesses to those who fancy us.

And sometimes your relationship is the very problem you want to discuss.

That's where The Samaritans can be useful. We're more discreet than your best mate, we'll listen as carefully as your girlfriend or boyfriend, and we're as sympathetic as your family. We're also non-judgemental, unshockable, and extremely experienced.

Our national number is **0345 90 90 90**, and you can e-mail us on jo@samaritans.org or visit our homepage at www.samaritans.org. We're available 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

And you don't have to be climbing up the walls before you call us — any kind of problem, big or small, is a good enough reason to pick up the phone.

Call now. You'll find we're remarkably easy to talk to.

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The deck is stacked against us, say casinos

By Louise Jury

CASINOS – dealt an unwelcome hand in the Budget – are fighting back and demanding reform of the 30-year-old gaming laws.

Reeling under a surprise hike in gambling duty, the casino said the increase could force gambling underground.

On Monday they will call for the regulations which have rigidly governed their industry for 30 years to be updated.

The main irritation for the casino operators is rules on the maximum number of gaming machines permitted in any club. The number was increased from three to six in 1996.

But most casinos in Europe

1968 when the Gaming Act was rushed through Parliament to regulate a rapidly increasing number of clubs.

The British Casino Association will argue on Monday that things have changed since the year of the Paris riots and assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

A spokesman said: "The world has moved on, but casino legislation is stuck in a Sixties time warp.

"The casino industry values sensible regulation for the benefit of the industry and its customers, but an act which was conceived in the Sixties is out of step with modern society."

Mike Allison, a casino consultant, said: "Since 1968, casinos have developed worldwide. Nearly everybody who has looked at British legislation has said it's really not appropriate for the late 20th century."

"In the provinces, the average spend on the gaming tables per person per visit is in the region of £20. That's the cost of theatre tickets and a bag of chips. It's now a low-cost mainstream entertainment."

"At the moment, overseas visitors laugh at us. It's quite embarrassing."

Legislation was being prepared by the last government, but was lost with the election and the new Labour government has shown no great willingness to push it forward.

A Home Office spokeswoman said: "Certainly the present legislation is old and quite complicated, but overhauling it will require a comprehensive review." She said the Gaming Board, which keeps watch on the industry, thought the law should be looked at.

The industry's long-running gripes were compounded on Tuesday when Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, announced that the top rate of duty payable on casinos' gross gaming yield – the amount left over after gamblers' winnings – would rise to 40 per cent from 33.5 per cent from 1 April, generating an additional £20m for the Treasury.

Alan Goodenough, chief executive of London Clubs International, which attracts much of the lucrative business from overseas visitors, said if the measure had been in force last year, it would have paid 60 per cent of the extra duty.

"We shall be pressing as strongly as possible to persuade the Government that this is a mistake and should be reversed," he said.

If you tell your girlfriend, will she think less of you?

The chips are down?

- There are 116 casinos in the UK including 21 in London.
- The industry is worth more than £2.3 bn a year.
- It will pay more than £100m a year in gaming duty following Tuesday's increase.
- Nearly 11 million people a year go to a casino.
- The average spend outside London is £20. In London, there are a handful of people who will spend hundreds of thousands.
- Outside London, 65 per cent of players are men and 35 per cent women.
- Until last year, you could gamble until the early hours but drinking had to stop at normal pub closing time.

have between 100 and 500, and the large Las Vegas venues as many as 5,000. As much as three-quarters of revenue can come from the machines.

Other problems they cite include the ban on advertising of any sort and the requirement that members should register in 24 hours in advance of being allowed to play.

The casinos want to be able to place limited advertising in local newspapers and would-be members to be able to apply by post and then bring identification to the casino for confirmation. Membership of one casino should entitle the use of another one in the same group, the casinos say.

The proposals have the backing of, among others, the British Tourist Authority, which would like to include details of casinos in its guides.

The rules on gambling have been virtually unchanged since



A number of grievances. Casinos want more gaming machines, permission to advertise and a relaxation of membership rules

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YOUR HOME IS AT RISK IF YOU DO NOT KEEP UP REPAYMENTS ON A MORTGAGE OR OTHER LOAN SECURED ON IT.

Car crash left salesman 'too nice' to do the job

A SALESMAN'S damages award was more than doubled to £320,000 yesterday because although a road accident made him "a better person", he lost the aggression necessary for his job.

Charles Cornell suffered serious brain injuries in the accident on the M11 in Essex in 1991 which left him "a more

pleasant personality", said Lord Justice Stuart Smith in the Court of Appeal.

But although friends and relatives thought the change was "for the better", his "less aggressive" manner robbed him of his thrusting nature and he was described as "unemployable" in a "reputable sales force".

He had been awarded £156,143 damages by a High Court judge in January 1996.

But because the defendant had paid £175,000 into court to settle the case, Mr Cornell would have ended with nothing because he faced paying all the legal bills under court rules.

Three appeal judges increased his award after finding that he should have been given

£220,000 for future loss of earnings which took into account the problems he faced in finding jobs.

The judges had heard that a clinical psychologist, Dr Graham Powell, who examined Mr Cornell, of south-west London, found that he was now only capable of "muddling through life" and his future employment

prospects were "very uncertain indeed".

Mr Cornell, 31, was injured when a car being driven by his insurance business partner, Robert Green, left the motorway and ploughed into a field.

He suffered multiple injuries, including damage to the frontal lobes of his brain which

impaired his IQ, caused inter-

mittent memory loss and lowered his ability to concentrate.

The judges cut his award for injury, pain and suffering from £87,500 to £60,000, but increased the £30,000 he was awarded for future loss of earnings.

Lord Justice Stuart Smith said Mr Cornell - an Old Harrovian who gained two A-levels

when he was 16 - had been described as "bumping along at the bottom of the market" since the accident and was now unemployed.

He had lost the aggression, concentration and thrusting nature necessary for a successful insurance salesman and could no longer compete in the market place. His skills had been

lost at the outset of a career which had looked bright. He had been voted one of the most successful salesmen in the insurance market with "flair, stamina and a capacity for hard work".

The judge said the accident had taken away his "competitive edge" and he often fell asleep in the afternoons - a situation "few employers would tolerate".

Dying star provides nursery for new suns

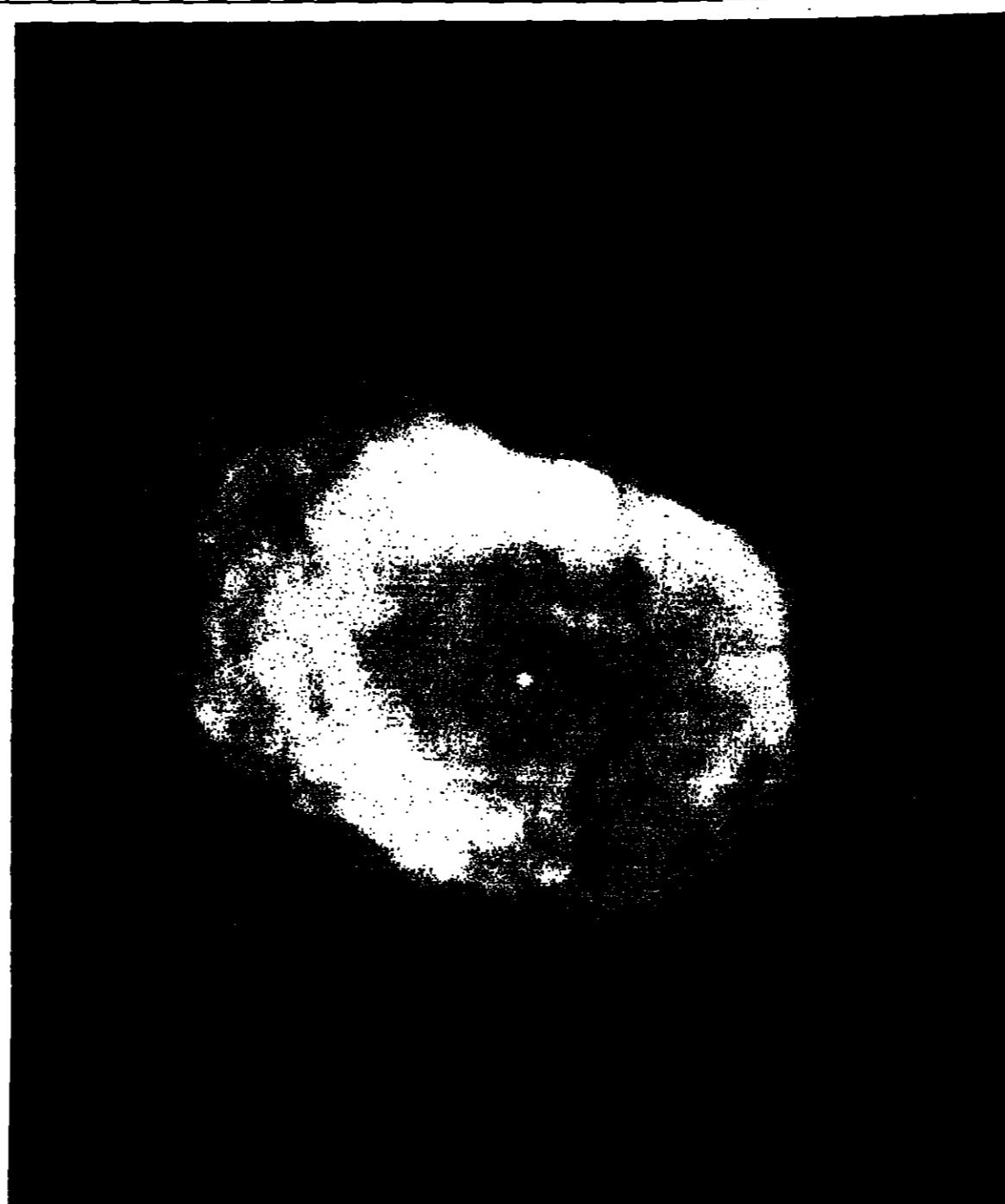
By Charles Arthur
Science Editor

THE DEATH of our Sun is probably going to look like this, five billion years or so from now: the moment when the hydrogen and helium from its core are thrown off into interstellar space, where they can create a new generation of stars.

This picture, captured by the Hubble space telescope, is actually of a star called NGC7027, which is 3,000 light-years away in the direction of the constellation Cygnus. It is in the stage known as a "planetary nebula" - because viewed by small telescopes, such cosmic explosions look like the disc of a planet.

When a star starts to die, the nuclear fuel at its heart runs out and a very dense, cool shell of hydrogen molecules is deposited around the star, far into space. The human eye cannot see this shell, but Hubble's infrared camera can. In the picture, the actual star is the intense white dot, while the shell of hydrogen atoms appears as the red wisps surrounding it; the white wisps are stellar dust. The actual distance between the star's surface and the shell is roughly 1.2 billion miles.

In a period lasting about 1,000 years, the molecular shell atomizes, and the resulting atoms are flung into space by a "solar wind" from the star. Meanwhile the matter thrown off will form the most primitive building blocks for other stars, planets - and any life that may form on them.



Stardust memories: NGC7027 in its death throes; pictured by the Hubble space telescope. Photograph: Nasa

'Star' row threatens endangered species

By Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

FIRST it was called the *Daily Worker*, then the *Morning Star* and now it has re-emerged, if briefly, as The Workers' *Morning Star*. Yesterday striking journalists at the paper made an uncomradely two-fingered gesture at their management by publishing a samizdat version.

The *Morning Star* proper has been off the streets for three weeks because of a walkout over the suspension and subsequent dismissal of John Haylett, the editor. Strikers have published two other small A3 substitutes for the *Star* but yesterday they produced an eight-page tabloid version. Habitual readers will find it ironic that staff introduced the adjective "Workers" into the masthead, given that the *Star* was always supposed to have been produced for the pro-

letariat by the proletariat. The stoppage threatens the very existence of the last Communist daily in the English-speaking world. Managers and representatives of the National Union of Journalists met yesterday at the Acas conciliation service to try to resolve the dispute. Last weekend Mr Haylett appealed to the paper's management committee, but his attempt to win reinstatement failed.

But the *Star's* controlling committee put him back on the payroll, which means he will be drawing £10,500 a year, the sum paid to all staff members. Talks yesterday were aimed at drawing up the terms of reference of a special appeals committee and deciding who should sit on it. Mr Haylett has been accused of "gross industrial misconduct", partly for unauthorised use of the office computer sys-

tem. NUJ members say the charge is "trumped up" and accuse Mary Rosser, chief executive, of nepotism for promoting her son-in-law from deputy editor to editor in place of Mr Haylett.

The conflict began because of a clash of personalities but is in danger of escalating into the kind of vicious political war beloved of the left. Management accuses strikers of cosying up to Arthur Scargill and his Socialist Labour Party, while in reply, journalists are levelling an allegation which for a Communist is the final insult. Pickets which attend daily outside the *Star's* offices in Hackney, east London, say their bosses are becoming too friendly with the Socialist Action group, an organisation associated with Trotsky, or the Great Beelzebub as he is known to orthodox Marxist-Leninists.



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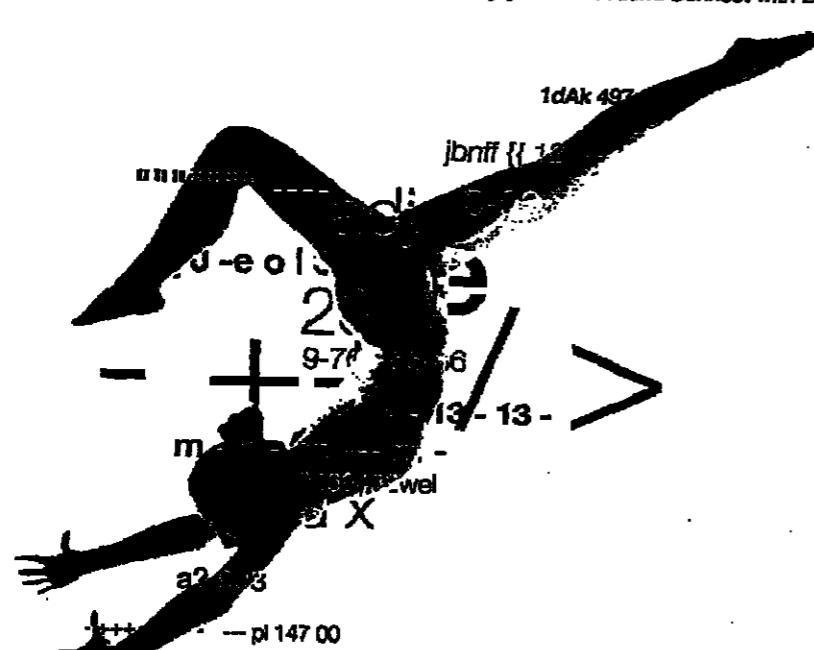
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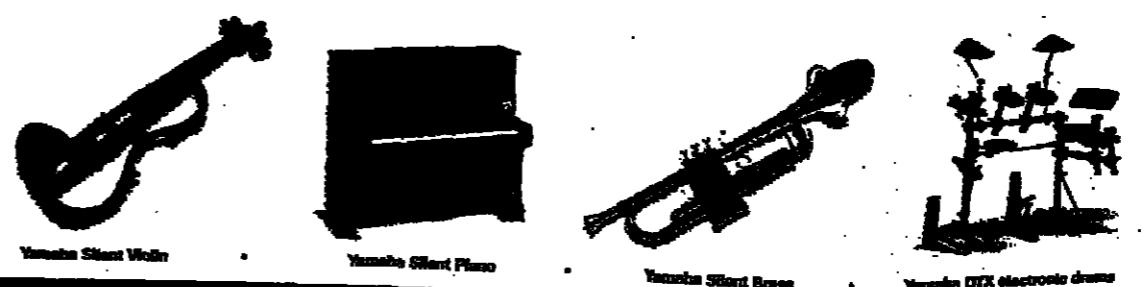
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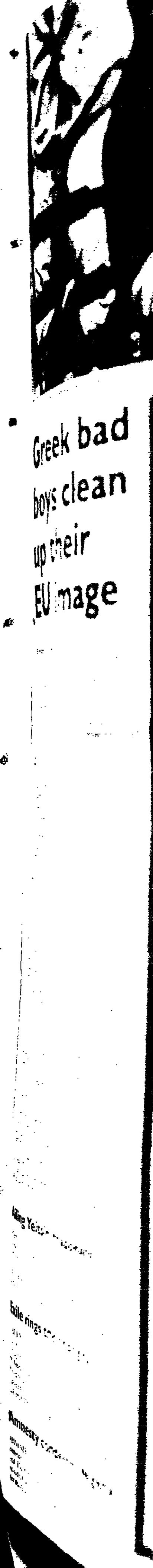


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Sit-in: A protester surrounded by police during a demonstration against a train carrying nuclear waste to Ahaus, north Germany. Photograph: AP

Dying star provides nursery for new suns

By Charles Arthur

THE DEATH of our Sun is probably to begin in 500 million years, or so. From now the element which the hydrogen and helium in our suns are thrown into space, where they can

start a new generation of stars.

This picture, captured by the Hubble Space Telescope, is showing a star called N 7027, which died 10,000 years ago in the direction of the constellation Cygnus. It is the second known as a "planetary nebula".

Because it is viewed by us it appears as a luminous explosion of light, like a planet.

What is actually happening is that the star has exhausted its hydrogen and helium fuel and has exploded outwards to become a giant. The luminous outer shell is the hydrogen envelope.

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Castro grabs the cameras to show delight at US move

By Mary Dejevsky
in Washington

IN A remarkable turnaround for one of the most prickly foreign policy relationships in the world, the Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, responded immediately and with warmth to news from Washington that economic sanctions were to be eased. Even before the formal announcement had been made by the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, yesterday, Mr Castro appeared before the cameras of the global news network, CNN, to describe the changes as "really positive".

US officials had let it be known the previous day that an announcement was imminent on a relaxation of policy towards Cuba. It was expected to include the resumption of direct flights between the US and Cuba, an increase in the amount of medicine and pharmaceutical supplies provided to humanitarian organisations in Cuba, and permission for Cuban exiles in the US to remit a limited amount of money – up to \$1,200 (£725) annually – to relatives in Cuba.

In his response, Mr Castro said the changes would help improve relations between the US and Cuba and pledged Cuba would do its part

to make things better. He stressed, though, that Havana would not abandon the one-party system, and said he wanted to see full details of the announcement before giving a full assessment.

Cuba's foreign minister, Roberto Robaina, who was in Geneva, appeared out of line with the new tone. He dismissed the US moves as "crumbs" and part of a political manoeuvre that Cuba could not accept.

Explaining the policy shift in advance, US officials said the decision reflected broad consultation on Cuba policy on the part of the US administration and the positive results of the recent visit to Cuba by the Pope. They stressed that the policy shift was in recognition of the greater "space" allowed to opponents of Fidel Castro's communist regime in the wake of the Pope's visit, and designed to assist people without assisting the regime.

Their comments also made clear, however, that, while the economic embargo would remain in force, Washington was no longer aiming to use political and economic isolation to topple Mr Castro. This detail that may explain the Cuban leader's positive response.

In one respect, the policy changes return the situation to what it was two

years ago, before Cuba shot down two small planes piloted by Cuban exiles. In others – the increase in medical supplies, and possible sales of food – they go further, and open the way for an eventual relaxation of the economic embargo. A softening of US policy also makes it less likely Washington will apply the Helms-Burton law – which threatens sanctions against third countries and individuals that do business with Cuba. This would remove a source of tension in Washington's relations with European countries and Canada.

Domestic reaction in the US was divided, illustrating the sensitivity of any change in US Cuba policy. The large and vocal Cuban exile community in Florida was split between groups pleased that maintaining ties with relatives would be easier, and those objecting that the memory of the four dead pilots was being honoured.

There was strong opposition, too, from the chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, Jesse Helms, and two Cuban-born congressmen from Florida. Among other things, they questioned whether Mr Clinton had the authority to reinstate direct flights to Cuba, for instance, that had been legislated by Congress.



Natasja Uggvari after testifying on Thursday about Monica Lewinsky's alleged affair with Bill Clinton. Photograph: AP Photo/Dennis Cook

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العنوان

العنوان

Clinton holds back from rubbishing accusers

By Mary Dejevsky
Washington

AS ALL Washington anticipated yesterday's opening of *Primary Colours*, the satirical film loosely based on Bill Clinton's campaign for the presidency, the pace of the real-life White House drama accelerated with the hurling of more accusations and the release of more documents. Mr Clinton, however, unlike his cinematic counterpart, appeared wary of taking the gloves off lest he damage his cause.

While his defence lawyer in the sexual harassment suit brought by Paula Jones was set to publish papers in support of his argument that the case should be dropped for lack of evidence, the White House was denying anything too sensitive or salacious would be produced. It was denied that the women's answers cast doubt on the truth of their allegations.

By making the material public, at the same time as submitting it to the judge, Mr Bennett clearly hoped to counter the impact on public opinion of Ms Willey's television interview and of the 700 pages of documents made public a week before by

Ms Jones's lawyers. The documents included large sections of Ms Willey's account of her 1993 encounter with Mr Clinton and passages from Mr Clinton's sworn testimony in the case.

This reluctance on the part of the White House to exploit information at its disposal, may reflect a decision to hold back the most damaging material until it is really needed. But it can also be traced back to last year, when Mr Bennett caused an outcry from women's groups by saying that if women other than Paula Jones were called to testify about Mr Clinton's sex life, the private lives of Mr Clinton's accusers would be fair game.

On Thursday, Natasja Uggvari, a schoolfriend of Monica Lewinsky, testified to the grand jury investigating the White House sex scandals. She made no comment afterwards.

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Trainspotting and the art of Impressionism

PARIS
DIARY

John Lichfield

Claude Monet was a railway enthusiast. His wonderful painting of the Normandy express at the Gare Saint-Lazare is familiar to visitors to the National Gallery in London. It is one of a series of 11 views painted on the platforms and tracks, and even inside a signal box, at the station in 1877/78.

Seven of these canvases – full of steam and light and movement – have been marshalled for the first time in 120 years in an exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris (which, of course, used to be a railway station itself). The exhibition, which lasts until 17 May and goes on to Washington, is called *Monet, Monet La gare Saint-Lazare*.

Edouard Manet's railway connections are less well-known. The father of Impressionism had a studio on the Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, overlooking the maze of tracks approaching Saint-Lazare. The poster for the exhibition is his painting *Le Chemin de Fer*. It shows a young woman and a little girl with the station in the background, mostly obscured by a cloud of steam.

The canvas caused something of a scandal when exhibited in 1873. Why should the little girl in a lovely blue dress have her back suddenly turned to the artist? Why is she gazing into the steam? The answer is obvious to anyone who, like me, spent their childhood lurking about railway stations. The little girl was an early Gallic trainspotter (somewhat overdressed for the part).

Full steam: Monet's 1877 study of *La Gare St Lazare* – one of the paintings on show at the Musée d'Orsay

Photograph: Bridgeman Art Library

I have been travelling by train a good deal recently – mostly by TGV, but this week to Strasbourg on one of the last of the French main lines yet to be replaced by purpose-built fast tracks. In Britain, railways have become a shrunken, scruffy and weed-infested affair. Returning to the great junction at Crewe is like visiting an old friend dying of some wasting disease.

In France, on the old main lines, nothing seems to have changed. Every small station still has a goods yard; every big

station has a satisfying jumble of criss-crossing rails; in the depths of the countryside, smart-looking branch lines set off into the unknown. This is no illusion. The SNCF still has more than 20,000 miles of operating railways: a total rivalled only by the US, China and India.

The price is, of course, massive public subsidy. Passengers and freight customers pay £3.5bn a year to use the SNCF;

the government gives the railways another £3bn a year. The last government planned to

change all that but then took a U-turn. The question of rail reform – ie massive cuts – is theoretically still on the agenda. But the transport minister in the Jospin government is Jean-Claude Gayssot, known to his friends as the "Comrade Minister". He is a Communist, a former railwayman and a former rail union official. No sudden change is anticipated.

We have, literally, a running battle with

the family who live in the flat below. They object to

the sound of our children sprinting over the bare parquet floors. They have a fair point but not one they have ever put to us directly. All complaints are directed through the *gardienne* (concierge), a Bosnian Serb Jehovah's Witness given to wearing cerise sweat-shirts and purple track-suit bottoms. We thought an uneasy truce had been established until the other day, the *gardienne* approached my wife and said: "The people in the flat below were wondering when you will be buying a carpet."

French doctors have a fundamental approach to medicine. The cure for almost everything, it seems, comes in the form of a suppository. The other day, my wife took Grace, five months old, to our doctor with a bad cough. He prescribed suppositories but added a lecture, with sketched diagram, on how they should be applied. Contrary to common sense, it appears that the blunt end of the suppository should go in first. No wonder the French are hopeless at darts.

Le Pen link has right in chaos

By John Lichfield
in Paris

Front, predicted that the centre-right of French politics would "explode" next week, with elements of the UDF and Gaullists forming a new party and others joining the Front.

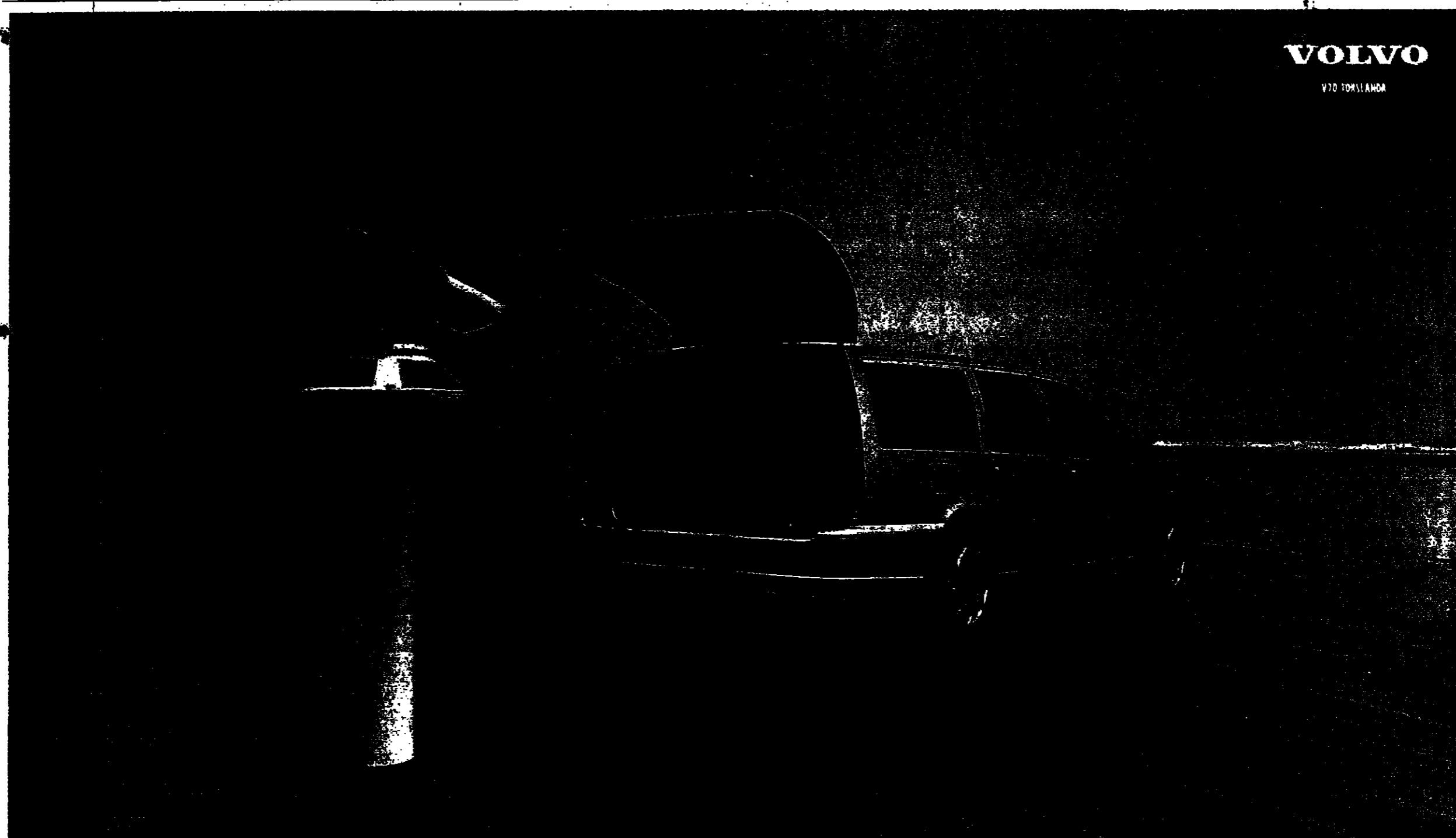
The Socialist former culture minister, Jack Lang, spoke of a "black day for the Republic..." He accused the regional politicians who made deals with the Front of "renegeing on promises to the people" and "slurping the vile soup offered by the ... neo-fascists".

The crisis on the right follows regional elections last Sunday which produced a confused electoral pattern all over France. The Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin's, left-of-centre coalition topped the poll in 11 out of 21 regions in France. But it won an outright majority in only one.

In at least nine regions, the National Front was left holding the balance of power. The national leadership of the "traditional", or respectable right, had pledged beforehand to make deals with the Front and to accept minority left-wing right governments if necessary.

Once the election results came in, local centre-right leaders all over France, desperate to cling on to regional power after their defeat in national elections last year, began to make secret or open deals with the NF. Despite warnings from the centre-right national leadership, and from Jacques Chirac, the Gaullist President of the Republic, there was widespread revolution when regional assemblies gathered to choose their presidents yesterday.

A breaking of the mould of right-wing politics in France is now possible, with dangerous implications for French democracy.



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Horror hotel has vacancy for a demolition man

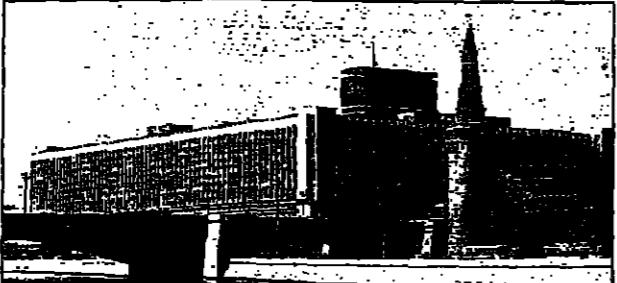
By Phil Reeves
in Moscow

CAN THERE be another building on the planet which is both as monstrously ugly and as unhappily located? For 31 years the Rossiya Hotel has kept intact its reputation as one of the world's eyesores, a blot on a Moscow landscape that includes such pearls as the Kremlin, Red Square and St Basil's Cathedral. But that bad name may be on the way out.

So monolithic are the vital statistics of this soulless block of glass and concrete that it for years made the record books.

The Rossiya was built by the Soviets as the biggest hotel on earth, a boast it can no longer uphold. It has 3,071 rooms for 5,000 guests and the corridors are of such endless-seeming lengths that Russians jokingly advise visitors to arrive with a compass.

History has not been kind. A fire in 1977 which killed 42 people did not close it. Nor did a plague of rats and cockroaches



Blot on the landscape: Hotel Rossiya, Moscow

in 1994. Nor did the murder in January of its director, Yevgeny Tsimbalistov, who was shot in what appeared to be a Mafia contract killing. He was the fourth hotel executive to be murdered in Moscow in 18 months.

Small wonder that new investors are not always clamouring at the door. But now

claims are circulating in the capital about plans for the hotel, which stands only 200 metres from the Kremlin walls.

Just over a year ago, the city announced a scheme to let it to the hotel's spokesman, no

fewer than 120 proposals of various forms have been made. "These are being examined," he said. Equally cagey was the Moscow Association of Hotels. "This is not a simple process. There is an officially adopted concept about the development and reconstruction of the hotel which is signed by the Prime Minister [Viktor Chernomyrdin]. The hotel is supposed to be divided into smaller hotels," explained its spokesman, Anatoly Bulgin.

But "official concepts" have a way of being ignored in Russia. *Kommersant* newspaper recently reported that the search was on for an investor willing to demolish it and build something more appropriate in its place.

The newspaper published a front page photograph which "disappeared" the hotel. The resulting cityscape was greatly improved.

Bringing the place down is the difficult bit; building something better, given the ugliness of the place, should be a doddle.



Pride and prejudice: Serbs waving their national flag at a demonstration in Djakovica 50 miles west of Pristina against demands by ethnic Albanians to secede Kosovo province from control by Belgrade. Photograph: Darko Vojinovic/AP

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No love lost as Christians battle over cathedral

BLACK ROBES swishing, thousands of Orthodox priests silently marched in a show of strength through the Transylvanian city of Cluj yesterday, where a week ago Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholics exchanged fistfights in a contested cathedral.

"Are you Orthodox? If so, come with us," an Orthodox priest called out to one of the 1,000 bystanders who had gathered in the centre of the city, 203 miles north-west of the Romanian capital, Bucharest.

The Orthodox priests had come from all over Transylvania for the silent march. Many of them did not make the sign of the cross in front of the cathedral, which one week ago was handed back to Eastern Rite Catholics after 50 years.

Orthodox faithful customarily cross themselves in front of any Christian church.

Eastern Rite Catholics who held a service yesterday shut the cathedral's front doors and said they would not allow any Orthodox inside. They used loudspeakers to broadcast the service into the street.

The tension between the two religious communities dates back to the end of the Second World War, when Romanian Communists suppressed Romanian Christians who professed loyalty to the Vatican and in some cases handed over their buildings to the Orthodox church hierarchy.

The Catholics claim that the Orthodox priests colluded with Communist authorities.

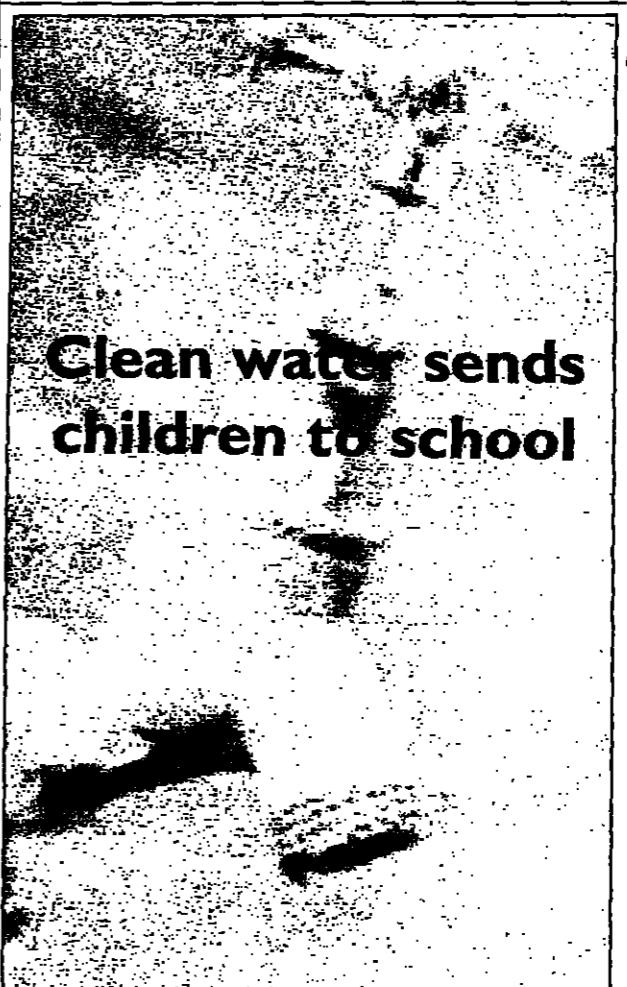
"You should be carrying Stalin's portrait," an old woman, who said she was an Eastern Rite Catholic, called out to the Orthodox priests.

Last week, Romanians were shocked by scenes of Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholics hurling the communion table and other holy objects around Cluj's 16th-century cathedral.

Police yesterday maintained a low-key presence on the march.

"I don't understand these manifestations," said Arpad Pal, an ethnic Hungarian watching the priests march. "Christianity is a religion of love and we should love each other."

— AP, Cluj



Clean water sends
children to school

On Thursday 26th March 1998 The Independent will be publishing an 8 page report in association with WaterAid about the issues surrounding people's access to clean water and effective sanitation in the developing world.

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Annan steps warily into Middle East minefield

By Robert Fisk
in Beirut

FIRST we had the Russians bringing peace to the Middle East in the shape of Victor Possovaliuk, special envoy to President Boris Yeltsin. He told us at the Lebanese foreign ministry that Moscow supported UN Security Council Resolution 425, which calls on Israel to withdraw from Lebanon. Then came the hero of Har Homa, our own Robin Cook, who also supported 425, but noted that the Syrians would like Golan back at the same time as the Israelis left Lebanon. Yesterday, the saviour of Baghdad, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, turned up to tell us how much he wanted to see 425 implemented. Within 10 days, it will be the Iranian turn to tell us, in the same marble-corridored foyer of the Beirut foreign ministry, what a jolly good thing 425 is.

Mr Annan – or Mr Kofi as the Lebanese like to call him – is no fool. And while he would like UN resolutions implemented in the Middle East, he knows well that the Syrians are in no mood to see Israel pull out of Lebanon and thus lose the only military pressure they have on the Israelis: the guerrilla war in the south of the country.

Besides, he realises the snakepit of double standards does not permit him to lecture the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the same way that Bill Clinton likes to threaten Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Israel ignores UN resolutions and remains America's protégé in the Middle East; Iraq ignores UN sanctions and gets regularly biffed for doing so.

Mr Annan has, in fact, so well understood the double standards of the area that he spoke with admiration of Washington's lamentable stewardship of the "peace process". In Jordan, he gave US efforts his "full support". In Beirut yesterday, while acknowledging that it had run into

"a number of unforeseen [sic] difficulties", he told us he hoped "that the efforts that the United States is making to push forward the peace process will succeed". This is odd, since American efforts to dig up the corpse of the Oslo agreement appear to involve little more than mild criticism of Israel's continued settlement-building, fierce Israeli-style demands for the Palestinians to suppress "terrorism", and a refused dinner date for Benjamin Netanyahu with President Clinton (a courtesy Mr Netanyahu extended to Mr Cook this week).

But Mr Annan is, in reality, treading a very gentle path through the Middle East minefield. He can desire the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 425 on Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab land – upon which the "peace process" is supposed to be founded – without condemning Israel for refusing to obey the UN. It was the American-sponsored Oslo agreement that offered the Palestinians a hope of a state – not the UN.

"One thing you can say for Annan is that he knows how to navigate," one of his aides muttered to me amid those marble columns yesterday. Indeed, Captain Kofi is not going to sail his boat into an iceberg. That will be left to Yasser Arafat and Mr Netanyahu and, possibly, Captain Bill Clinton himself. The UN Secretary-General's trip around the Middle East was not a mission with a set of proposals, his men informed us. He wanted to learn, understand, to hear all sides.

Twenty years ago, the Lebanese were demanding that the Israelis obey the UN resolution and withdraw. The Israelis refused. Now the Israelis say they want to withdraw, but the Lebanese – fearful of Syria's anger if Golan was not returned at the same time – want conditions attached to 425. No wonder Mr Annan wants the Americans to carry the can.



Reaching out: Aboriginal performer Djakapura Muyarryun inside the 'Sea of Hands' display on Bondi Beach. The display – featuring 120,000 signatures – has travelled Australia as a symbol of support for Aboriginal rights

Indian guru digs deep to find meaning of life and death

By Peter Popham
in Delhi

31 other people were charged with criminal offences, all were acquitted after a 10-year delay.

Three years ago, another man in Gujarat is said to have performed an equally arresting act, "cutting off his head", according to *The Pioneer*, "and offering it to the gods".

An air of mystery surrounds the subject of the latest *samadhi*, as such religiously motivated acts of terminal self-effacement are called. He arrived in Dandi Pipalai five years ago, people say. In his years in the village, he did nothing but carry out *pujas* – religious ceremonies – acquiring a circle of devotees as well as a wife and two sons. He was only 37 at the time of his death.

Police, possibly goaded by the rationalists, have begun proceedings against Mr Bhagat's widow, Vimlaben, and five followers, for aiding and abetting suicide. Mrs Bhagat reacted angrily. "Why are they doing this to us?" she told the *Indian Express*. "We didn't do anything. It was his wish and the whole village accompanied him on his last journey.

"We were there when it all happened – myself, our two sons. There were nearly 300 others." She had learned of her husband's death-wish nearly three years ago. "He knew when he had to die. He used to say he would not live on this earth a moment longer than had been divinely ordained. 'I will know the time when I will be asked to leave this earthly vehicle,' he would say. On his last journey, people were singing. They had come in lorries, on foot. We don't have any sadness or guilt in our hearts. We are happy."

Then she lit five more Bristols (the incense of choice in these parts) and sprayed the mound with room freshener. "Only Bristols and the most expensive perfume are good enough," she breathed piously.

FIVE smouldering Bristol cigarettes outside a mound plastered with cement mark the spot where Vilji Bhagat breathed his last.

On 3 March, on the boundary between two remote villages in Gujarat, north-west India, Mr Bhagat climbed down into the hole he and his followers had dug here and he sat in meditation with a coconut balanced on his head. Then his wife and disciples shovelled earth on him until he was buried alive.

Overnight the spot became a place of pilgrimage: green flags honouring Mr Bhagat's patron saint were raised and hundreds of people made the trek by bus and autorickshaw to the grave at the grave.

But there were dissenters. A local scientific association, the Saurashtra Science Committee, said the incident was "deplorable, since it encourages superstition in a scientific age". On Wednesday, some 80 volunteers from this and other rationalist groups turned up at the grave, planning to dig up the body. They wanted, they said, to persuade Mr Bhagat's admirers that his suicide had been a "freak and an irresponsible action" to which no religious significance should be ascribed.

There were 2,000 believers at the scene, however, who were in no mood to chop logic, and an ugly clash was averted only when police waded in with bamboo staves.

This corner of India has something of a name for memorable suicides. It was in neighbouring Rajasthan 11 years ago that a woman called Roop Kanwar shocked the nation by committing suicide, allowing herself to be burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre. Suttee has long been illegal, but although the woman's father-in-law and

people were singing. They had come in lorries, on foot. We don't have any sadness or guilt in our hearts. We are happy."

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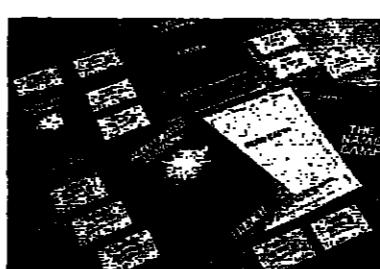
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Talk of the Toon

Newcastle's bonnie lad has fallen from grace. And things might get worse for Freddy, say Ian Burrell and Tim Laxton

"IF YOU hate Freddy Shepherd, clap your hands," came the wave of venom reverberating around the stands at Newcastle United's St James's Park on Wednesday night. For the object of this derision, the new battlecry of the Toon Army, was the stuff of nightmares.

Ever since he was a lad, when he had stood amid the swaying mass of the Gallowgate end, cheering on his black and white-striped idols, the Geordie team meant everything to Shepherd. Now, as the club chairman, he has his name on the best seat in the ground. On Wednesday, he had chosen to leave it empty.

Three days earlier, a tabloid newspaper had reported that Mr Shepherd, and his vice-chairman Doug Hall, had luridly boasted to an undercover reporter of their sexual exploits with prostitutes in brothels around the world, and abused the club's followers. They also allegedly described Newcastle women as "dogs", insulted the club's star players and mocked the fans who paid £50 for replica shirts which they claimed cost £5 to make.

By Wednesday, after using a public relations firm to issue a meek apology to his family and the people of the North-East, he went into hiding.

But Freddy Shepherd is not a natural recluse. Inquiries by

The Independent have revealed that the man from Newcastle's impoverished East End has acquired an astonishing network of influential friends and allies in national and local government. Just how influential was made apparent when Freddy and his brother Bruce hosted a New Labour fund-raising evening, hosted by Tony Blair, at Mitford Hall. The ancient Northumberland seat of the Mitford family – immortalised in Jessica's *Hous and Rebels* – had been acquired by the two Shepherd brothers for £2.5m in 1992 and they both have homes there.

That particular night in 1996, the great and the good were out in force. As well as Blair, there was John Prescott and Nick Brown, the Labour Chief Whip, who is considered a Shepherd family friend. Their company, Shepherd Offshore, which had given money to the Tories in 1993, made a £1,000 donation to Labour. The brothers have also allowed government ministers visiting the North-East to use their company helicopter.

Another rich man's plaything which Freddy enjoys is his boat. The current president of the Newcastle Yacht Club, he shares ownership of a luxury motorcruiser, called *Apollon*, with Sir John Hall, his great friend and mentor. When Sir John, who has dominated sporting and business life in the

North-East in recent years like no other, stepped down from Newcastle United – passing his 57 per cent shareholding to his son Doug – he allowed Mr Shepherd to succeed him last December.

By last week the fans were demanding his head. Newcastle supporter Sir Jeremy Beecham, former leader of the city council and now chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, was at Wednesday night's match.

"They have said things which really make their position untenable," he said.

Last night Freddy Shepherd was holding on to his position by his fingernails. It's a long way back down to where he came from. He grew up amid the back-to-backs and outdoor toilets of post-war Albion Row in rundown Byker. Freddy's father

Charles set up a one-wagon haulage business, and his uncle William was a rag and bone man. In the 1950s, Charles Shepherd took his family to Australia but soon returned to Byker, where his sons, Freddy and Bruce, joined his firm. They did good business delivering equip-

were masters in getting hold of the derelict sites and the government regeneration grant that often went with it," said one Newcastle businessman.

By 1991, Freddy Shepherd had become a good friend of Sir John Hall, the new Newcastle United chairman, who made

Meanwhile, his business links with the Hall family grew. They purchased a property close to St James's Park for £28,358 in 1993 and sold it to the football club in 1995 for £203,000.

Shepherd Offshore now employs 85 people and has diversified into warehousing, property

eneration alone. Their shareholding in Newcastle United is worth just over £10m.

But as the clamour for Freddy Shepherd's head grows louder, inquiries by *The Independent* have revealed that his business affairs could be about to make him even more enemies.

The regeneration of Freddy Shepherd's native East End depends very largely on the success of a £35m project based on reviving shopping along the old Shields Road in Byker.

In December 1995, the council-backed plan – based around the building of a new food supermarket – successfully bid for £24m of government regeneration grants. But within two months, the Shepherd brothers announced plans for a rival 82,000-sq ft store, a mile away on an industrial site at Walkergate. The Shields Road

investment farming and the provision of conference facilities. It also has a stake in Newcastle's rugby union, ice hockey and basketball clubs, which are controlled by the Halls. During the last four years, the brothers have made £6m in directors' remu-

nerance alone. Their shareholding in Newcastle United is worth just over £10m.

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When he became Newcastle chairman, Freddy Shepherd said: "To be chairman is a great honour for someone who comes from the East End of the city and stood on the Gallowgate End."

He now risks letting down the people of the East End – as well as Newcastle United. As Kevin Miles of the Newcastle Independent Supporters Association puts it: "They have brought shame on the club, on the city. They will not be forgiven."



'The Shepherds were masters in getting hold of the derelict sites and the government grants that often went with them'

ment for the growing offshore oil industry, and renamed the family firm Shepherd Offshore. But their real boom period was in the dark years of the shipbuilding industry, when swathes of riverside land became vacant. "The Shepherds

him a club director. As the club came within an ace of winning the Premiership in 1996, Freddy Shepherd's position was assured in Newcastle society – a small circle of businessmen and politicians who dominate the lives of 750,000 people.

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'It took two seconds to reject my application'

One of Tony Blair's political mentors has landed a £30,000 job in an NHS trust. With no such connections, Jean Shackleton was not so lucky

THE whole way appointments are made to NHS boards is a mystery to me. I have years of experience working at a very senior level in social services and voluntary organisations, but it took an official just two seconds to reject my latest application to join a health trust.

Tory health spokesman John Maples recently accused the Government of manipulating appointments to NHS boards.

A spokesman for Health Secretary Frank Dobson replied: "This is not and has never been intended to be a politically motivated exercise to replace Tory deadheads with Labour deadheads." Now Paul Trippett, who runs the Labour club in the Prime Minister's constituency, has landed a £30,000-a-year chairmanship of an NHS Trust.

An advertisement appeared in a national newspaper in 1996 seeking Chairmen and Non-Executive Directors of Special Health Authorities and NHS Trusts. No formal qualifications were needed, but the skills required were formidable. My application was approved and I was placed on a "database" at Milton Keynes. Then, I began to get that unwanted feeling. I was told in a letter dated 30 July, 1996: "When a vacancy arises, the database is searched for suitable applicants. Shortlisting is undertaken locally... a Regional Assessment Panel. The chairman will decide who to propose for appointment from [this] shortlist... The appointment is made by the Secretary of State, who requires a choice of candidates."

One of the Trusts asked if I would help in a voluntary capacity as an Associate Manager reviewing legal status of patients sectioned under the Mental Health Act. I was and am delighted to do so. However, after one year I had been interviewed once, had two training sessions with a third planned, and have attended one review of two patients.

There were more advertisements this year for Chairmen and Non-Executive Directors to National Health Service Bodies.

To get thus far, I had filled in a large form, sent a CV and troubled two rather highly placed people for references.

My next letter was dated 31 January 1997. The Nolan inquiry and the substantial size of the database were quoted as the reason for keeping on the database only those people who "have been assessed as appointable by the Regional Panel". I was off the list. But I was advised that advertisements would soon be appearing locally. They did and I phoned three local trusts for application forms, each of which had to be returned to its local trust – no mention of Milton Keynes.

In February 1997 I filled in three large questionnaires, attached CVs and troubled my referee again. Two of the Trusts found my expertise not suitable to the balance of interest they were seeking for their boards. The third did not reply. When I phoned, they said they had not received an application from me and had sent their shortlist to the Secretary of State.

My application was

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The application, however, doesn't state the power of that little box. Yet, I had written underneath it of the associate management and elsewhere of the community experience one has as a Director of Social Services. Why didn't I tick that box? Sheer modesty, after ticking every other high-powered item.

My complaint about an administrative officer taking two seconds to put me on the scrapheap means my application has been referred to an independent assessor. But the unwanted feeling is back. Every sentence from Milton Keynes is peppered with despair about the number of applications and the complicated procedures that I am unlikely to surmount.

Frank Dobson's message about the appointments that accompanied the application forms was: "We are looking for people to be members of local NHS boards who live in the area, who have a strong commitment to the NHS and who have the time and ability to contribute to its success. We are particularly keen to recruit people who are users or carers as community representatives on our boards as well as those with other relevant experience."

Meanwhile, I am lost in paperwork, while some spiritual body who alternately dematerialises and materialises in Milton Keynes, picks up the goal posts and runs like hell.

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Jean Shackleton: Lost in paperwork



Getting to grips with Leo

Suzanne Moore finds the presence of Leonardo DiCaprio, Hollywood's latest heartthrob, in London has set female (and some male) pulses racing

SOMETIMES people just don't get it. Even when it's staring them in the face. I got it a while ago when one of my daughter's friends lost the picture of HIM that she sleeps with every night around at my house. A major panic ensued for the sake of it. She could not live without the sacred image. Two days ago, several young girls of my acquaintance were among those screaming their hearts out in Leicester Square for he is here, walking amongst us mere mortals and he is the 'Sun King' Leonardo DiCaprio.

Those who have had any recent contact with adolescent girls will not regard "Leo sickness" as anything new. It has been building for the last couple of years yet somehow it has caught the British press by surprise. As always, the reactions of young women have been seen as out of control, hysterical and nothing more than a passing

fad. But as usual the little girls understand in a way that grown men never do.

Over the past few days I have had some interesting conversations with men who have described Leonardo as little more than a "foetus", "a terribly hampered actor", "not worth thinking about" or as Jonathan Margolis put it in *The Mail* "What is remotely appealing about this wimpish 23 year old boy?". The sub-text to all this is that modern women are actually intimidated by real men - I take this to mean men who are fat, bald and boring - and now, madly, prefer babies.

The secret of DiCaprio's appeal is obviously to do with his youth, but it is also to do with his sexuality which, rather than being non-existent, is far more androgynous and unthreatening than that of many teen idols. He is pale, skinny, balding looking and, in the new film *The Man in the Iron Mask*, a great rump of a movie, decidedly feminine with long hair and frock coats.

So we have read that DiCaprio doesn't

date since his heart was broken by model Kristin Zang, that he is lonely and has no one to take to the Oscars. Besides he doesn't want to go anyway in case he overshadows those he respects. We can read that he is actually dating Naomi Campbell or various other supermodels. We have Kate Winslet telling us that working with sex god Leonardo was amazing because they really looked after each other and kissing him was like kissing her brother. To which we can only ask how does she know? We have the talk of his platonic relationship with Sharon Stone when he was nineteen and making *The Quick and the Dead* and though Sharon poured out her heart to him she didn't want to do a sex scene with him because of the age difference.

This combination of gentleness, ability to form good friendships with women and yet never to have a permanent girlfriend is the perfect way to get a young girl's heart for it implies a sexual passivity in the midst of a sexually aggressive culture.

What you hear over and over again when you talk to girls about him is their fantasy that he is just extremely kind and caring and nice. Sexy, but unthreatening.

According to Amelia she would still find him gorgeous if he were gay, but "no of

ly sexy. As Amelia "almost 12" tells me: "I liked him before I got to secondary school, but when I got there everyone likes him. He is so gorgeous and could never be horrible or scary. He has a calming voice."

DiCaprio is also popular among some gay men who are sick of the macho look and the gay press this week is full of promises of "Leonardo naked".

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Main attraction: Leonardo, pictured at Cannes, was catapulted to stardom in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (top) and has consolidated it in his latest epic *The Man in the Iron Mask* (below)



He has been anointed, not by the movers and shakers, but by the movie-going public

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What you hear over and over again when you talk to girls about him is their fantasy that he is just extremely kind and caring and nice. Sexy, but unthreatening.

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DiCaprio is also popular among some gay men who are sick of the macho look and the gay press this week is full of promises of "Leonardo naked".

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THE INDEPENDENT

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Hague can save the People's Europe

UP AND down the country, thousands of people are angry. So angry that many of them will converge on York this weekend to protest, rally, condemn, wave banners and hear angry speeches. What is it this time? Not fox hunting or beef on the bone, but the single European currency. Oh that, you might say. Whatever happened to the euro? It prompted the late James Goldsmith to make "the most important video you will ever watch", delivered free to millions of homes in the run-up to the election. It was about sovereignty, our future as an independent nation state, the end of a thousand years of history. It was the issue which split the most successful party in the democratic world from top to bottom, forcing a sitting prime minister to beg his own party not to "bind his hands" in the middle of an election campaign, and sent the Conservatives crashing to humiliating defeat.

Then ... well, then it went quiet. Tony Blair's strategy has been to send the issue to sleep, bathed in the soothing balm of pragmatism and a willingness to join in principle - but not yet. Meanwhile, Tory wishful thinking that the project was bound to go belly-up before E-day has evaporated, with the Big Moment now only nine months away.

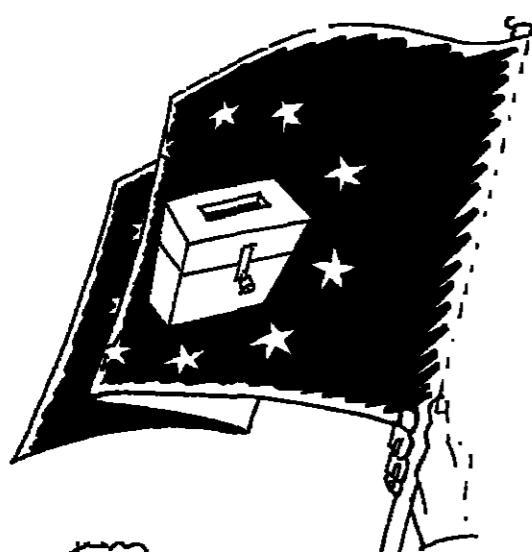
William Hague's dilemma is now acute: big business, which has long been his party's core source of funding, broadly welcomes the euro. Little England, which has long been his party's ideological bedrock, swears to die in the last ditch holding out against it. They are gathering under the banner of the Anti-Maastricht Alliance and the slogan "Save Our Pound" to lobby European finance ministers in York today.

When Mr Hague became leader the party yearned for clarity, so he went with the Little Englanders. But now that gamble looks an increasingly shaky bet for the long term. And he has found himself tied in knots over the wording of the policy: opposed to joining the single currency for 10 years, opposed for two parliaments, opposed at the next election. The ultras do not like it because they are against the euro in principle and for always. Businesses do not like it because they do not want to get left behind. And the general public do not understand it.

It is clearly time for the Conservatives to find a new approach. The stage was set by Mr Hague's unlikely advance guard, Michael Portillo. Last year he was used to trail caring Conservatism before Mr Hague's conference speech. Last weekend he sounded like a *Private Eye* parody apology on David Frost's soft sofa. He may have given the impression, he almost said, that supporters of the euro were wicked federalists plotting to take away Britons' birthright by stealth. He now wished to make it clear that he "respected the point of view" of those who believe the euro will unite Europe and avoid future wars. He still disagreed with it, but "if that is the enterprise they have embarked upon, I wish them well."

This week the elements of a new policy were floated in the press. It was suggested that Mr Hague would drop any fixed timetable for opposition to the euro and set out instead the tests for membership. In addition, he would shelve the idea of a referendum of party members on the issue. Conspicuously, none of this was contradicted by the Tory leader's speech to small business people yesterday.

The question is: is this a plausible strategy? Our answer: not really. For the rag-bag of the Anti-Maastricht Alliance, it is a simple sell-out. It does not matter how tough and impractical Mr Hague's criteria are, merely by setting out the conditions under which he would support Britain's theoretical entry into monetary union, he would be repeating the one error their



heroine Margaret Thatcher admits to making - that of moving into the grey zone marked "when the time is right".

That will not satisfy Lord Tebbit, with his vivid comparison of Economic and Monetary Union to the *Thames*, nor Lord Shore, accusing Gordon Brown of trying to sell a "poison package" to the British people.

It paves the way for a *rapprochement* with business leaders - except for Euro-sceptic millionaire Paul Sykes, who is paying an opera singer to serenade the Chancellor and his fellow ministers with "Land of Hope and Glory". But most businesses would probably prefer to deal with a Labour Government that was more constructively engaged with the euro currency zone.

None of this, however, is nearly enough. Mr Hague urgently needs a bigger theme with which to transcend the divisions of his party and the apathy of the majority of the public.

Luckily, Mr Blair's soft-softy approach to Europe provides him with precisely such an opportunity. Why should the Tories not seize the rhetoric of a People's Europe and make it their own? Why not outflank Labour by proclaiming the goal of a democratic Europe? After all, as a party of recent government, they know all about how the institutions of the European Union are governed by deals and trade-offs behind closed doors. The one criticism that supporters and opponents of European integration agree on is the "democratic deficit" - that the EU's ruling bodies are too remote from the continent's peoples.

The sceptics are right to point out that the Danish government went on holding referendums on Maastricht until it got the "right" answer (they have another one shortly on the Amsterdam treaty revisions). They are right to point out that the German people are opposed to the euro.

There is no doubt that the European Parliament is a deeply flawed democratic assembly. For all the brave talk about opening up the Council of Ministers, it remains an obscure series of closed meetings.

The People's Europe theme is consistent with moderate Euro-scepticism. A truly democratic Europe would have hesitated for much longer over a single currency. It would have had a long and open debate over the extent to which the European Central Bank should be under political control.

It is not too late to propose a new constitution for Europe, far from it. With the imminent end of the Helmut Kohl Era, and the expansion of the EU by up to 10 more members, now is precisely the time, especially for a party freed from the constraints of office, to move boldly beyond an acceptance of the state of Europe as it is.

Labour seems to have settled too easily into the technocratic consensus of Brussels cabals, with simultaneous translation. If the Tories show imagination, they have the chance to lead the European argument once again.



PICTURE OF THE DAY

100-year-old habit: the nuns of Tyburn Convent celebrate the centenary of their order, formed in Paris in 1898 and established in London in 1901

Photograph: Kalpesh Ladigra

A 9x12 print of this photograph can be ordered on 0171-293-2534

Probation works

"PRISON WORKS", the "famous slogan" so elegantly demolished by your leading article ("Why our prisons are not working", 20 March) damaged more than the prison system.

Although public thinking about punishment is beginning perceptibly to change, probation-run sentences are still trying to recover from the damage done to their credibility in the last five years as "prison works" effectively marginalised and dismissed all else. Prison and probation were deliberately set up in opposition, rather than being seen as different punishments in the same spectrum of disposals to be used by judges and magistrates.

Probation services supervise about 30,000 more offenders than go through prisons in the course of a year, and usually for much longer periods. Granted, these offenders are usually less dangerous to the public but they are often more prevalent and their offending is no less intractable. Without claiming absolute success, results show that reoffending is reduced, victims are spared and the offender is given an improved chance of going straight.

These sentences are neither soft (about six million hours of unpaid work is carried out by offenders on community service per year) nor without discipline (between 20 and 30 per cent of those who breach their orders are briskly removed to prison).

Probation also provides the programmes that accord with the new catchphrase as "tough on the causes of crime": unemployment, drinking, drug-taking, educational under-achievement, degenerating moral standards and outright selfishness.

The probation service works to serve the justice system and the victimised public. We need more champions who are prepared to come forward to nail their colours to this constructive, if non-populist, mast.

MARY HONEYBALL
General Secretary
Association of Chief Officers of
Probation
London E1

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

EU's undeserving poor

THE announcement this week by Monika Wulf-Mathies, European Commissioner for Regional Policy and Cohesion, about changes in EU funding ("Britain to lose EU aid to regions", 19 March) divides the people of Europe into the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. It would appear that we in the UK fall into the second category.

The UK is the fourth poorest country in the EU and one of the largest net contributors to its funds. To date the Commission has allocated resources according to need. However, following publication of the draft regulations, it appears that richer EU regions may stand to benefit at the expense of other regions with equally important economic and social problems.

The UK is being penalised because of its lower levels of unemployment. In fact, financial assistance to support job creation should be given to the poorest regions and they are those with the lowest gross domestic product (GDP). South Yorkshire has been highlighted as one such area where declining heavy industry has had a severe impact. However, there are other areas which have equally severe problems and yet seem to be offered no help and are to remain excluded from the benefits of EU funds.

The Isle of Wight is one such area. Our GDP is 64 per cent of the EU average. This is lower than South Yorkshire, Merseyside and Cornwall. Our unemployment figure of 9.9 per cent is the highest in the south east. Wages on the island are 16 per cent below the national average.

The Government must act to ensure that we do not remain in pic-

turesque poverty as the "undeserving poor" of Europe.

S COWLEY
Deputy Leader and Chairman
Economic Development Committee
Isle of Wight Council
Newport, Isle of Wight

Radioactive food

YOU report ("Britain's radioactive lobsters upset Norway", 19 March)

Michael Meacher's confidence that radioactive foodstuffs pose no threat to health.

Mr Meacher gets his advice from the National Radiological Protection Board, who believe that internal radiation can be understood in terms of a crude "average dose" model;

NRPB's belief rests on that of the International Commission on Radiological Protection; ICRP's rests on studies of disease in Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors - people exposed to external radiation. These studies have fatal flaws.

First, Professor Alice Stewart has shown that the radiation resistance of the A-bomb survivors is not, as ICRP assume, typical of the population at large. Second, the studies are silent about the health effects of internal radiation.

These other weaknesses show that the officially accepted model is not scientifically secure, yet it is used to estimate the risks of discharges from nuclear plant like Sellafield, and of letting nuclear waste be recycled into consumer goods under the new European Basic Standards Directive. Predictably, those risks are judged to be "below regulatory concern" so the consumer will not be informed and will have no choice.

Mr Meacher says "there is never room for complacency", but when abundant evidence of genetic damage at very low doses was reported to the

European Parliament in February neither the UK government nor NRPB was represented, and neither the UK nor the EU is funding research into this field. Complacency is rife.

RICHARD BRAMHALL
Co-ordinator
Low Level Radiation Campaign
Llandrindod, Powys

Dividing by three

WHATEVER method the Dean of Westminster Abbey uses to separate the sheep who come to pray from the goats who come to gawp, it will not be by trage ("Pray or pay at Abbey", 19 March). For that, as its name suggests, is the dividing into threes originally of coffee beans into those of the best quality, middling or broken; and, more recently, of patients caught up in a medical emergency into those whose lives can be saved by rapid treatment, those who can wait a while and those also for whom no treatment will avail.

Incidentally, it may be that once upon a time a trial was a necessary process only for the third class of individuals neither obviously guilty nor obviously innocent.

ROSS KESSEL
Malborough, Devon

Foreign Office blunders

NOBODY should blame Robin Cook for his real or alleged blunders in Israel. Ministers act mostly on the advice of their officials.

In 1991, John Major, during a visit to the USSR, was not allowed by the Foreign Office to meet the leader of the opposition, Boris Yeltsin, who a few months later was elected president. It was a monumental blunder by the FCO "advisers".

OLEG GORDIEVSKY
London WC2

Murder, rape and hunting

STAN ROSENTHAL asserts (letter, 17 March) that hunting is in the same category as paedophilia, rape and murder. It is in fact extremely simple to distinguish between them.

Murder, rape and child abuse all involve objective harm to an unconsenting human being. Hunting does not. It really is as simple as that.

JONATHAN JONES
Oxford

No ordinary Chancellor

ANDREW MARR is quite right to object to the torment that spin doctors inflicted on the Chancellor in order to make him look aware of families, children and their needs before his Budget ("Playing happy families is not the way to the nation's heart", 17 March).

Surely Gordon Brown's entourage should have understood by now that they have a sulky, pouting star on their hands. All they really have to do is let him slowly work his magic on the voters, who will soon come to love him as Heathcliff rather than Cliff Richard.

The same sort of mistake was made once before with a national celebrity, when Laurence Olivier was cast in a West End play entitled *Semi-Detached* in which he was required to play "an ordinary bloke". As the critics and public agreed, Olivier could do anything - anything but be ordinary.

MAUREEN GREEN
London SW1

Pitt's income tax

DESPITE what William Hartston says (Budget Bite, 18 March), Income Tax has not been with us ever since 1799. Pitt abandoned it almost immediately because of technical problems. He reintroduced it soon afterwards. It was in fact withdrawn after Waterloo; then brought in once again in 1842. It's been with us ever since then.

ROBERT DAVIES
London SE3

Cartoon

STAN ROSENTHAL asserts (letter, 17 March) that hunting is in the same category as paedophilia, rape and murder. It is in fact extremely simple to distinguish between them.

Murder, rape and child abuse all involve objective harm to an unconsenting human being. Hunting does not. It really is as simple as that.

JONATHAN JONES
Oxford

QUOTE UNQUOTE

I would be happy to see the Devil's buttermilk banned from society — Ian Paisley MP on *Draught Guinness*

I hang a sarong on the gatepost, so people should know if I am there. With luck, they will just see steam rising from the grass — Rupert Grey, lawyer, who bathes in a tub near a "right to roam" path

If I am given the privilege of becoming the first democratically elected Mayor of London I'll never write another book — Lord Archer, Tory peer

The Red Book or presumably in the Prime Minister's case the unread book — William Hague, Tory leader, on the post-Budget Treasury document

LETTER from THE EDITOR

THE Chancellor's annual Budget speech is one of those events that mark the newspaper year. In

the diary for months, lots of build-up, everyone from staff to contacts to friends claiming to know what he will say, then the silence while he speaks, followed by a mad, exhilarating dash to print the paper on time, to dissect, explain, analyse, every single thing he said.

This year, as in previous years, *The Independent* did not produce one newspaper for the morning after the Budget but effectively twice a 21-page section poring over Gordon Brown's words; and our normal "non-Budget" paper, full of the other news that day. It was frantic and hair-raising - not least when I was told, with less than an hour to go before deadline, that our computers were finding it hard to cope with the information rush and were slowing down - but we got there.

While the Budget is a fixture in the calendar it is also one of the ways in which a newspaper can be judged. How did we do? How did our coverage compare with our rivals? The answer to both, I am delighted to say, was brilliantly. No obvious howlers, no gaping holes, no sense of getting the balance wrong. Mind, it was touch and go. When

Mr Brown sat down we realised that thanks to the insistent prodding of his anonymous "friends" in Whitehall we had schemed in page 4 of the Budget section for pensions, ready for a major announcement. But, of pensions, barely a whisper. It was that sort of Budget: a lot of nudges and winks beforehand but little to set the pulse racing on the day.

ONE AREA where the Chancellor did send the right sort of signal was the environment - but not to the satisfaction of all our readers. On the morning after the Budget, one reader rang in to complain that Mr Brown must have something against tall people. I'm not against environmentally friendly cars, he said, but I can't pack the car into an eco-friendly Mini Metro. The call made me realise what it must like to be the Chancellor, confronted by every minority interest going, lobbied on all fronts, constantly reminded by anxious civil servants to examine all the pitfalls. At least in a newspaper, we can try and address most people's views and problems but to actually take decisions that directly affect how many pounds they have in their pockets and

even what car they should drive, must be hell - yet Mr Brown gives the impression of being in his element. Hmmm...

THE BIG news of the week was that the Government has now pronounced that men are no longer the official family breadwinners. This realisation, revealed in *The Independent* - we regarded it as so important as to put it at right of the top of the front-page in our "hamper" across seven columns - should herald a bright new dawn for all working mothers, of which I am one. Yet, what did we see in the Budget speech just hours previously? Very little to improve the lot of women struggling on their own to raise children and to hold down jobs. It is all very well for a male-dominated Government to notice a social phenomenon that many of us have known for years. Whether it will actually translate into meaningful reform of a system that still reflects a bygone age, when the man went to work and the little woman stayed at home is quite a different matter. I wait to be impressed, Tony and Gordon.

ROOSIE BOYCOTT

JOEL IN KSO

Just suppose I looked like Leonardo DiCaprio...



DAVID AARONOVITCH
ON THE PROS AND CONS OF LOOKISM

WHAT would have happened to me, I wonder, if I had been as beautiful as Leonardo DiCaprio?

I don't mean the film-star thing, I'm just talking about how my life might have been different if, instead of looking like this (dear reader, please supply your own mental arrow to the picture above), I had looked like this (now create your own mental picture of luscious Leonardo, in the unlikely event that there isn't already one somewhere in the pages of this Saturday edition). What village sex god lies buried here?

Let's start at age 10. In the third and fourth years at Gospel Oak primary school, as the Beatles sang *Love Me Do* (and the Rolling Stones belted out the – to us – incomprehensible *Let's Spend The Night Together*), all the boys in my class were rated by the girls, from Number One downwards, on personal lists. The chief criterion for a high placing was a pre-pubescent version of fanciability – what the Americans call "cuteness" – though pre-feminist caprice played its part too, fortunately.

These lists were prepared once a week, ruthlessly, for two years. That made about 60 lists in all. And I came top just once, one golden week when caprice won out over cutie. Otherwise, I hovered around 10 – above the obese and one-eyed, but well below the sex gods. On a par with Edward Fosbrook. No; badly dressed, large featured and scowly, I was always more in demand for quizzes than for kisses.

Nor was I ever interested by strange men. The rather mild perverts who hid behind trees on Hampstead Heath in the Sixties, camouflaged in gaberdine, left me well alone. They were simply not that desperate. I was always slightly offended by this, although, like being a milk monitor, it was only because I hadn't been asked – not because I actually wanted the job.

Now, if I had looked like Leonardo...

I would have been top of those lists every single time. Their publication would have held no terrors for me at all. And every gaberdine from the Lido to Jack Straw's Castle, would have opened at my approach. But let's move on.

And let's skip adolescence. Being astonishingly good looking in an all-boys comprehensive school is of limited benefit. The only quality that is truly valued there is a bone-headed athleticism. I guess Miss Humble, the gorgeous blonde teacher who once, unwise, confided mild details of her sex life to *Cosmopolitan*, might have taken more notice of me. That's it, though.

But now we reach the part where it really matters. And can I get one thing clear? When I was Leonardo's age, I was no fatter than he is now; I did not discover food until I was 25. Still, I was not often going to be able to persuade beautiful young women into bed with me by virtue of my looks alone. Other talents had to be put on display, other tactics deployed. Seduction, for the unfair of face, is a branch of the arts. It involves timing, sensitivity and – above all – speech. Most of us learn to become Cygnus.

So, I compensated. I wooed with words and diffidence. I cajoled. Above all I constructed a self of immense sweetness, strength, humour and reliability. If you can't fancy this man's face, the message went, at least check him out as a father to your newborn children. Sometimes I begged.

Mostly, however, I failed. No, that's wrong. Mostly, I didn't bother even trying (which was sometimes – paradoxically – a very effective come-on). And if ever I did succeed, I behaved (on the whole) with a decorous regard that shouted to my pretty partner, "Thank you for having me. And please, please let me come again." I tried.

Ah, but what if I had looked like Leonardo? If a tempest or suggestive smile had been enough to furnish my student bedroom or bachelor house with the nubility of British womanhood? Would I have tried then? Would I have displayed such elaborate – and functionally unnecessary – regard for the feelings of my partners? Would I hell. If every ticket you buy wins the lottery, why spend any time on choosing the numbers? That's what I always say.

So, young Leonardo DiAaronovitch probably does not become a writer. And, ah! We move on to middle age, and by now I am probably ahead. I have settled down with a woman who is (by common consent) much better looking than I am. Brighter, too. But how might my Leonardo self have fared? He – I'm fairly sure – would be on his third marriage, leaving a trail of maladjusted children and vengeful ex-wives, all of whom simultaneously hate and adore him. Trapped into wedlock by a ruthless model at 26, it is all downhill from there.

By the time we are both 45, I will be loads happier than my Leonardo alter ego. And yet. A few minutes ago I took the lift down from the offices of the *Independent* to the concourse where they sell coffee of the most complex kinds. There were three young, okay-looking women and me. For 18 floors, and through three swing doors, we travelled together. And not one of them so much as glanced at me. I was invisible.

But Leonardo would not have been ignored. One would have smiled at him, one would have blushed, and the third would have brushed his thigh with hers. Bastard.

We have ways to make sure that your genes become your destiny

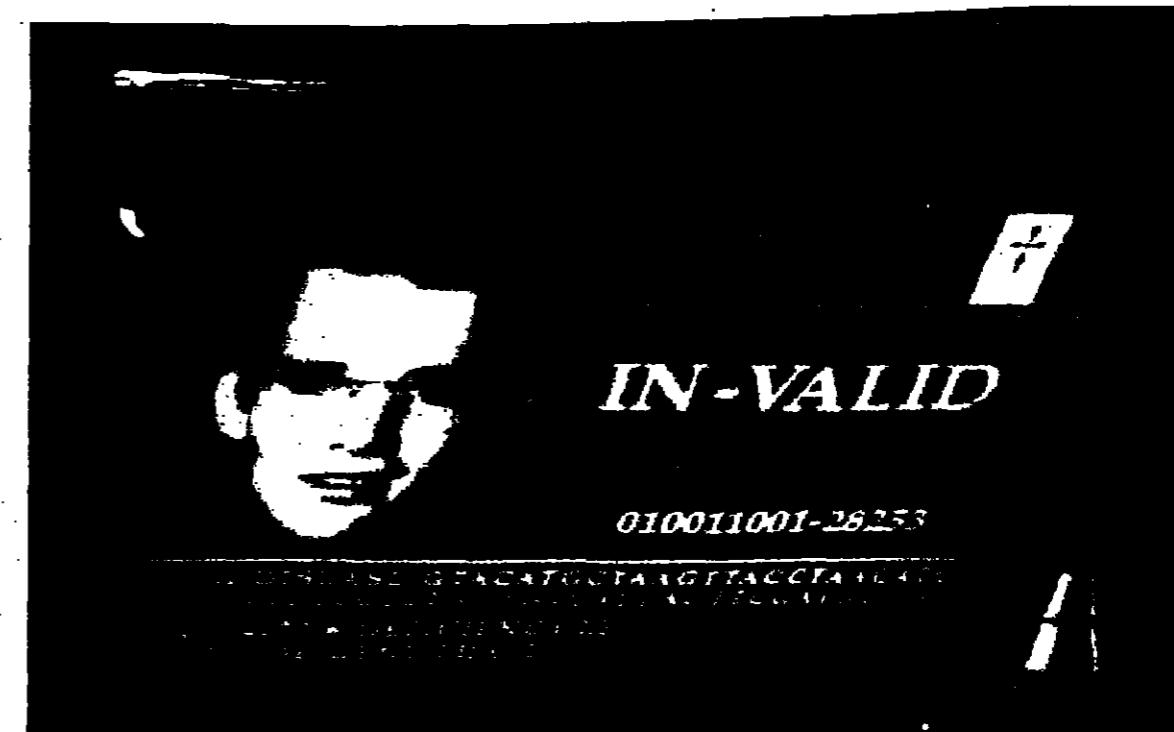
The world depicted in the cautionary film, *Gattaca*, is not far away, but says Tom Wilkie, we can still choose a different future

I share a genetic defect with the lead character of *Gattaca*, the film about DNA-based discrimination which went on general release yesterday. It's a common condition, usually regarded as trivial, but I've always been sensitive about it. In the Orwellian world of *Gattaca*, set in the not-too-distant future, people like me would not be allowed. Or rather, we would be allotted a lowly place in the social and economic rungs of society, consigned by our genetic make-up to an untouchable caste.

Gattaca is a cool, stylish thriller set in a society where people have come to believe that DNA is destiny – that our futures can be mapped out in our genes. There is certainly precedent for that: no less a person than Jim Watson, the discoverer of the double helix of DNA itself, told *Time* magazine in 1989, "We used to think our destiny was in the stars. Now we know it's in our genes."

Into this society comes an impostor, Vincent Freeman, whose life ambition is to travel into space on a mission to Titan, the largest of Saturn's moons. But Vincent was conceived in the American way, in the back seat of a car, and the roll of the DNA dice has left him short of the genetic gold standard required of astronauts. No efforts he can make by himself will remove the modern marks of Cain.

By the time of his younger brother, however, their parents' passion is under control and they conceive lots of embryos by in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), selecting only the genetically most healthy for implantation into the mother's womb. *Gattaca* is a world of designer babies, achieved not by sophisticated genetic engineering, but by a plausible extension of what is already being practiced. In Britain today, some embryos conceived through IVF are already having their genes checked and selectively implanted. This pre-implantation diagnosis is being carried out under strict regulation (in this country at least) and for the most honourable of motives. Some mothers at risk of having boys with the devastating genetic disorder Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy have elected to have only female embryos implanted because the disorder, like



Are we heading towards a world in which people can be labelled 'in-valid' because their DNA isn't up to par?

haemophilia, is expressed only in males.

Gattaca is a cool, stylish thriller set in a society where people have come to believe that DNA is destiny – that our futures can be mapped out in our genes. There is certainly precedent for that: no less a person than Jim Watson, the discoverer of the double helix of DNA itself, told *Time* magazine in 1989, "We used to think our destiny was in the stars. Now we know it's in our genes."

Into this society comes an impostor, Vincent Freeman, whose life ambition is to travel into space on a mission to Titan, the largest of Saturn's moons. But Vincent was conceived in the American way, in the back seat of a car, and the roll of the DNA dice has left him short of the genetic gold standard required of astronauts. No efforts he can make by himself will remove the modern marks of Cain.

By the time of his younger brother, however, their parents' passion is under control and they conceive lots of embryos by in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), selecting only the genetically most healthy for implantation into the mother's womb. *Gattaca* is a world of designer babies, achieved not by sophisticated genetic engineering, but by a plausible extension of what is already being practiced. In Britain today, some embryos conceived through IVF are already having their genes checked and selectively implanted. This pre-implantation diagnosis is being carried out under strict regulation (in this country at least) and for the most honourable of motives. Some mothers at risk of having boys with the devastating genetic disorder Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy have elected to have only female embryos implanted because the disorder, like

Jerome? The individual who passes through the turnstile every morning or the man whose DNA profile passes the turnstile? And what happens to sexual relationships in such a society? In one scene, people queue up to have DNA samples analysed – single strands of hair from potential lovers and partners – including one woman who has her lips swabbed to analyse the DNA of the man she kissed 20 minutes earlier, to see if she should take the relationship any further. Another nice touch is the helical staircase in the apartment shared by Vincent/Jerome and Jerome/Eugene.

Genes are not destiny, but they could become so if everyone starts believing that they are

Vincent who officially becomes Jerome (who retreats to his middle name, Eugene – a pun on eugenics meaning "well-born"). The name's hand-over is symbolic (Jerome means "sacred name") and the film's title too is a pun, deriving from the four key chemicals in DNA – guanine, adenine, thymine, and cytosine – whose acronym spells GTCA.

As the relationship between Vincent/Jerome and Jerome/Eugene grows beyond a mercantile one, questions of identity arise. In a society based on genetics, who is the real

But that is not the end of the matter. Next week, the Wellcome Trust will announce a programme to spend £15m over the next five years examining the sorts of issues raised fictionally by *Gattaca*. Half the money will go on bringing such ethical issues to public attention. Two plays for secondary schools have already piloted the initiative: *The Gift*, on genetics and *Cracked* on mental health.

The rest will go on research into the social and public policy consequences of biomedical advance, including understanding public attitudes and the values that inform public judgements on moral acceptability. The outputs of this research programme should help inform decision-makers at all levels about the appropriate policies to pursue in the light of developments in the laboratories and hospital clinics.

Most of the recent controversial scientific discoveries – Dolly for example – were the fruits of years of scientific research. Exploring their implications for society merits as serious an effort in social and policy research, rather than sound-bites and media punditry. That research may not lead to "the" answer, but it will map out some possible futures. Then it is up to society to decide.

And as for my genetic defect? That is a matter for me and my family. We do not live in the world of *Gattaca*. Yet.

Dr Tom Wilkie heads the biomedical ethics section at the Wellcome Trust.

Arise, you barons of the regions and the cities



TREVOR PHILLIPS
FAIR SHARES OF THE NATIONAL PIE

and the like. But they then spend every waking moment trying to sell us further exotic uses for fibre optic cables.

Do they think of the huge cost to phone subscribers when they make these decisions? This is not just about reprinting a few sheets of fragrant lavender notepaper. It is about telling eight million mothers, ten times each, that the number has changed. It is about the number of times you dial the wrong code and get that especially irritating voice telling you that you must dial again and you won't be charged. It is about the fact that whatever your new area code is, some estate agent will tell the newspapers that it's deeply unfashionable. And above all it is about Whitehall's determination to stop us identifying too closely with the regions in which we live.

However, there is a silver lining. Labour, though centralist by instinct, had a decentralising manifesto, to which it must, sometime, pay some attention. Even the phone companies are being brought into line. London, tragically divided between the 0171s and 0181 five years ago, will once again be reunited – ironically just about the time that the capital elects Richard Branson or somebody else Mayor of London. Perhaps the new Mayor will get to receive his first phone call of congratulations from the Prime Minister of Scotland, who will, if he is wise, be very nice indeed to his newly elected regional colleague. Other powerhouse city-regions – Cardiff in Wales, Manchester in the North-West, Birmingham in the Midlands can soon expect

to elect their own regional bosses. And this will not only change local government; it will change the dynamics of national government too.

That's because, as the Balkanisation of Britain picks up pace, the barons who lead the city-regions of the UK will want to rewrite the Magna Carta. In this respect, the pre-eminent baron in the land will be the Mayor of London. He or she will represent a third of the UK's economic power; the south-east has nearly a quarter of the population, and is the most dynamic region in Europe. This powerhouse provides more than £600 pounds worth of subsidy to the rest of the nation each year, according to study by the distinguished economist Douglas McWilliams.

No less a figure than Ken Livingstone alluded, this week to the Scottish deficit with London. He wants London's new government to insist on getting its dosh back, even if it means defying national government; actually I suppose Ken would like it back especially if it meant defying a Labour Prime Minister. The argument for this reverse redistribution is that the money London gives away at the behest of national government could go a long way to solving the investment problems besetting London Transport, which has to defend a lumbering, dirty, technologically outdated underground service.

John Prescott, who happens to be in charge of transport, as well as regional policy, narrowed the options for the putative Mayor yesterday by proposing a mild version of the sort of sell-off that

the previous government so loved. He is looking for private investors to buy the tracks, while the public sector (presumably the new London government) holds on to passenger services. I would be surprised to see the private sector rushing to take on the tracks without the right either to force up ticket prices or to develop the enormously valuable sites around major tube stations. But it's the test of whether this strategy works will be if it delivers a few new stations in the transport desert known as South London.

Of course, the basic point is that this sort of policy should not be coming from the mouth of the Deputy Prime Minister at all; he should not have to worry about the fate of any one region, even one as important as London. It should be the capital's own leaders who decide which parts of the transport system most need resuscitation, how it can be done, and which parts London can tolerate. The same should go for Newcastle, Leeds, Birmingham and Bristol.

But some in the political classes have serious reservations about this. The eyes of the most sophisticated political observers are turning to the success of regional parties in rich parts of Europe and North America, increasingly restive about having to bear the burden of supporting less favoured or less enterprising areas. In California, they worry about immigration, not just from the *faroles* of Mexico, but from trailer parks in Nevada and Arizona; in Milan, they vote for the Northern League to fend

off the Sicilians as much as the North Africans; and in Munich, it is a toss-up as to whether they loathe the East Berliners more than the Turks.

In the name of democracy, our government is giving expression to these trends, which is on balance, smarter than trying to suppress them. But Westminster's politicians have to be aware that the further they go towards developing the power of regions, the more they weaken their own strategic influence and their capacity to brighten the local barons.

Saying to Scots that they must play the game Westminster's way is one thing – Edinburgh knows that without that connection they would be hard put to pay the bills for their excellent schools, maintained on a pile of southern English spondulicks. It would be hard to make the same case to a region which has an economy bigger than Switzerland's and on the success of which the rest of the country relies.

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Chaos as FTSE soars past 6,000 to push top UK companies' value above £1 trillion

By Andrew Verity

INSTITUTIONAL investors yesterday angrily criticised the Stock Exchange's order-driven trading system, taking the shine off a surge in the FTSE 100 index of leading shares, which soared past the 6,000 mark for the first time yesterday.

The rise, which later fell away in a volatile day's trading, saw Britain's biggest companies valued for the first time at more than £1 trillion.

FTSE International, the company which publishes the index of leading shares, was forced to suspend the FTSE 100 for five minutes after rogue trades went through at as little as one-third of the market price.

Institutions privately said wild fluctuations, which saw the index swing by 230 points, had discredited the entire system.

One large fund manager, which handles billions of pounds of index-tracking funds, said it would protest to the Stock Exchange.

In just 15 seconds, between 10.15 and 15 seconds and 10.15 and 30 seconds, the index plunged by 160 points, only to soar by 140 points before the minute was up.

Traders were unable to see the fluctuation as FTSE International had suspended the index between 10.15 and 10.20.

The index was then recalculated without including two rogue trades in British Gas shares.

It is understood that in one bogus trade, 50,000 BG shares were traded at 108p, just over a third of the more normal BG price of 302p. In the same minute between 10.15 and 10.16, further 150,000 BG shares were sold at 20p.

Stephen Vale, spokesman for FTSE International, said the trades were "out of line with previous trades in the stock and broke the automatic param-

ters". It is believed to be the first time the FTSE 100 has been suspended since the Stock Exchange introduced its order-driven trading system last October.

A spokeswoman for one well-known fund manager, which handles billions of pounds in funds designed to track the index, said: "It is a bit of a funny system that can actually allow something like that to happen. The fact that you can have prices moving around like that - and you can't trade effectively - doesn't do the system any credit."

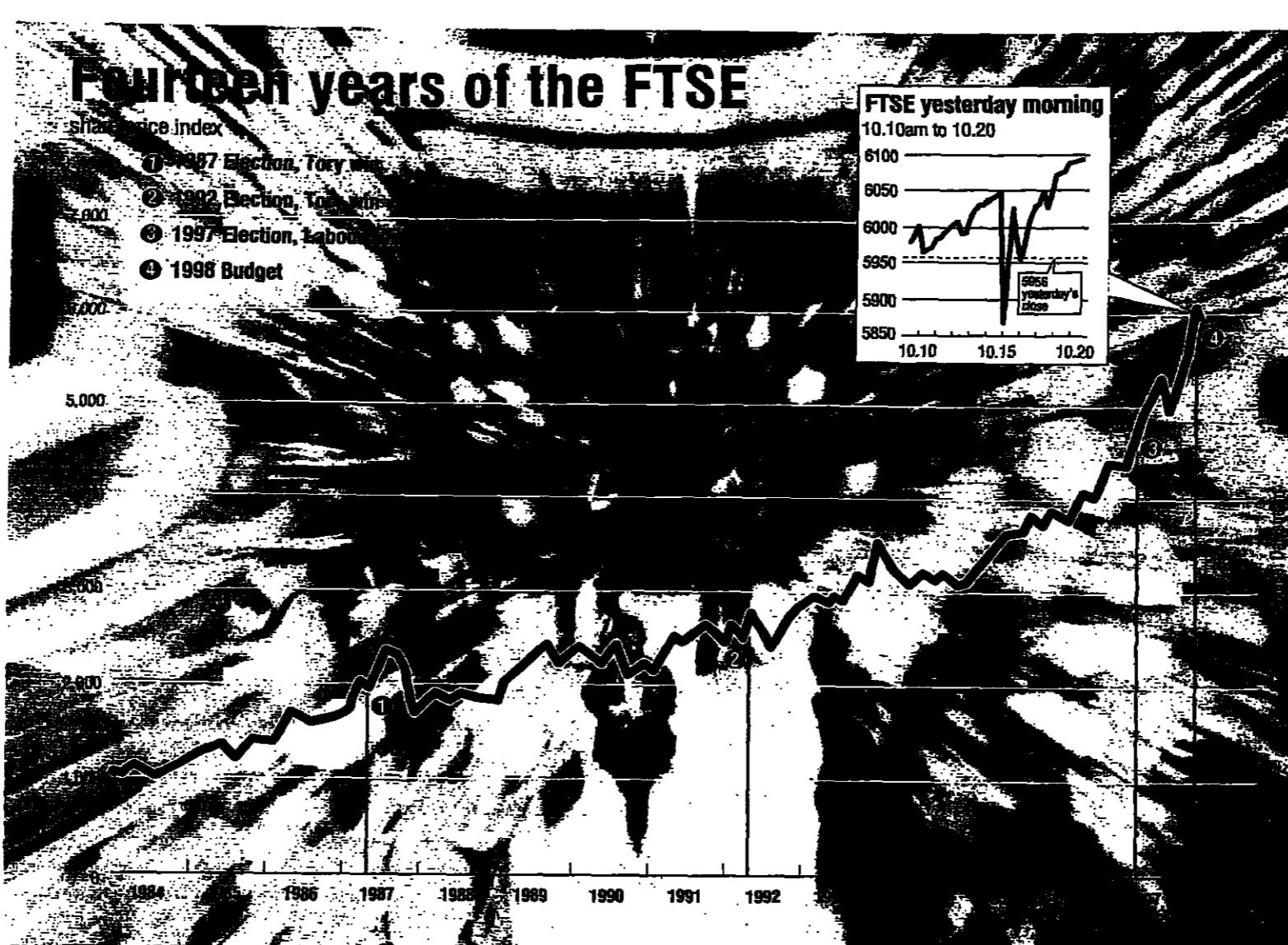
The wild fluctuations happened in the 20 minutes between 10.10am and 10.30am, the official period when futures contracts on the FTSE - financial instruments used to bet on market movements - were due to expire. Trading was at four times its normal volume on expiry dates.

Trading screens turned from a block of blue into a sea of red at the blink of an eye, rising at one point to achieve a 107 point gain before plunging to register a 117 point deficit.

The basket trades came in so quickly that stock exchange information systems simply failed to keep up. At one point, Reuters and Bloomberg screens differed by 150 points in the level they gave for the FTSE 100.

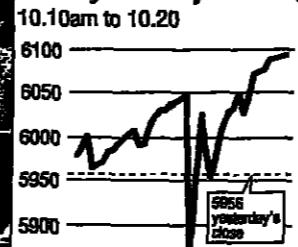
Simon Fine, UK equity strategist at Kleinwort Benson, said: "Both the futures and the options were expiring on a lot of volatility. Obviously someone had a quite large exposure which has caused the volatility."

Market sources said the volatility was caused by a pitched-battle between investment banks as the futures contracts expired. Wave after wave of "basket trades" - simultaneous trades in every company in the FTSE 100 - sent the index soaring and plummeting.



FTSE yesterday morning

10.10am to 10.20



Goldman Sachs, the giant American investment bank, was seen as a big seller of stocks, while other investment banks were net buyers.

Traders said Goldman Sachs was believed to have had a giant short position on FTSE futures, effectively betting that the index would be lower than others thought. It was selling shares which it had bought to hedge

this position. The volume of sales put downward pressure on the price.

The Stock Exchange's order-driven trading system normally suspends trades which are more than 20 per cent above or below the opening price - or the last order book trade. But this rule is lifted during the expiry period for FTSE futures.

In December last year, the

Stock Exchange slapped a record fine of £350,000 on JP Morgan Securities for stock manipulation. The fine followed an investigation into suspicious trading on 28 November, which found the firm had violated rules which outlawed attempts to manipulate the index.

Market sources believe the rogue trades yesterday could

have been caused by a mistake, rather than deliberate manipulation.

The surge in the FTSE was fuelled by a widespread belief that investors would invest heavily in Personal Equity Plans (PEPs) following the Budget. On Tuesday, Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, ended fears that PEP savings made before April next

year would be limited to a total of £50,000.

The FTSE momentarily hit 6,105 - a record level which values the top 100 companies at over £1,000 billion - before slumping to 5,880 and settling at 6,042.

After Wall Street opened, shares came off sharply and closed at 5,956.3, down 41.6 on the day.

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JEREMY WARNER
ON WHY IT WOULD
HAVE BEEN BEST TO
PRIVATISE THE TUBE
OUTRIGHT. THE
ARGOS DEFENCE,
AND SHENANIGANS
AT NEWCASTLE
UNITED

Why Prescott's got it all wrong over the Tube

SINCE New Labour is philosophically founded on the idea of the "middle" or "third" way—neither old right nor old left but New Labour—it is hardly surprising that we find the same rhetoric constantly cropping up in policy. John Prescott, our "give you a good belly" Deputy Prime Minister, was at it again yesterday, promising a third way approach for dealing with the problem of under-investment in London's Underground system.

What he's proposing is neither privatisation nor nationalisation but somewhere in between. The job of running, investing in, and maintaining the Tube's crumbling infrastructure is to be let out to private sector operators. For their trouble, they will be paid an annual fee from London Underground, which will remain in the public sector.

Our transport correspondent, Randeep Ramesh, thinks this is a thoroughly sensible, and quite clever, solution, allowing the tube to gain the benefits of private sector efficiencies while at the same time maintaining full public sector accountability and control. Perhaps more importantly, it will also allow the heavy costs of the investment needed to revive the underground to be spread over a 10 to 20-year period. Classic private finance initiative stuff, in other words.

I can see these arguments, but funda-

mentally I disagree. Actually this is not the modern, clever, third way it pretends to be at all, but a good old fashioned compromise, a messy and unnecessary fudge born out of political dogma as much as anything else. The ultimate cost to the taxpayer is virtually certain to be a good deal higher than either of the alternatives, privatisation or fully fledged public control. Like most things bought on the never-never, you don't notice it until years later when you tote up the costs and realise the full horror of your folly. Fortunately for Mr Prescott, by that stage he'll be long past caring.

The most sensible approach would always have been to privatisate the Tube outright. The money raised by floating it would have funded the necessary investment and some, and the public sector would for ever have rid itself of the costs of the capital's transport system. That was Labour's original opposition about privatisation of the railways. These old Labour objections to the concept of privatised utilities are reinforced in Mr Prescott's mind by the fear of being responsible for a fat cat profit. Privatisation, whatever its benefits, nearly always involves some degree of top slicing by the City and its friends. Politically, Mr Prescott would never have been able to stomach being involved in another privatisation giveaway.

On the other hand, the public sector solution was always going to run up against many Gordon Brown at the Treasury. Mr Prescott has managed to squeeze another £500m for his department out of the Chancellor for next year, most of which will be spent on keeping the Underground up and running. But it's not enough, not nearly enough. Hence... PFI "third way".

Don't be conned. The idea that this provides a solution is just accounting mumbo jumbo. It gets the capital costs off the Exchequer's books and allows them to be spread over a prolonged period of time, but one way or another we still pay. Moreover, because the private sector has a higher cost of capital than the public, and always demands a return, the cost is likely to be higher. One way or another, the fat cats are going to have their cream. The PFI merely forces them to think of ingenious new ways of doing it. This is not the right solution, and in his heart, Mr Prescott probably knows it.

THE BATTLE for control of Argos, the catalogue retailer, has so far been one of the dullest hostile takeover bids in recent memory. After a novel first over, when it emerged that owing to illness and fatigue, Argos had neither a chief executive nor a finance director, the impasse has settled into one of stultifying boredom.

Thankfully, the phoney war is about to

come to an end. Assuming Mrs Blockley doesn't rain the whole thing off by dispatching Lord Wolfson's £1.6bn bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, we can expect the pace to quicken a bit over the next few weeks. Mind you, the above possibility shouldn't be wholly discounted.

On conventional competition criteria, there's not much of a case for referring GUS's bid. GUS has a dominant market share of conventional agency mail order, but it's not in Argos style retailing at all. Even so, officials at the Office of Fair Trading have been impressed by the argument that the deal should be judged more on whether it harms the consumer than on traditional market share assessments.

A comparison of the two catalogues reveals that Argos is a good deal cheaper on many items than GUS. Furthermore, Argos is planning a big push into home shopping (the modern day equivalent of mail order). So it's reasonable to contend that the takeover would move a big slug of actual and potential price competition from the market.

All the same, the argument is a long shot and in any case Argos would be foolish to make an MMC reference the main point of its defence. Stuart Rose, the new chief executive, would get no thanks from the City for that.

Instead this former stalwart of M&S

is planning to kick off the serious part of his defence next week with a series of presentations in which he will robustly challenge the idea that Argos is over the hill. Argos badly disappointed expectations last year, and there is little doubt management had become overly sleepy and complacent.

But the concept is still a supremely successful one which up until last year had consistently delivered double digit revenue and profits growth. There's no reason it shouldn't do so again. The financial pyrotechnics—a big special dividend and profits forecast—come later. My guess is that Lord Wolfson is going to have to pay a minimum 650p a share to be assured of success. Given that his opening shot is only 570p, he's going to have to bite hard on his pride to pay it.

I FIRST MET John Mayo when he was working as an SG Warburg corporate financier on the demerger of ICI and Zeneca. He's a clever, talented man and he deserved his success, first at Zeneca and now as finance director of GEC. So what possessed him to join the board of Newcastle United, whose corporate affairs seem richly to deserve the team's nickname, the magpies, is something of a mystery. The inevitable reckoning has come sooner than even I could have predicted. If he is to salvage his City reputation, Mr Mayo must either fire the club's wayward directors, or resign himself.

Umbro sacks US workforce to stave off financial crisis

By Andrew Yates

UMBRO, the US-owned British sportswear group, is relocating its head office to Manchester and sacking virtually its entire workforce in America in order to stave off a financial crisis which has threatened the group's future.

The decision to slash costs is a concerted effort to return the group to a stable financial footing. The move is likely to mean Umbro will be able to renew the contract to supply the England football kit.

Umbro has decided to shut down its sales operation in the US, having already announced the closure of its manufacturing facilities over there, which will result in the total loss of more than 500 jobs. It is close to securing a licensing partner in the US which will market all its products.

Umbro is also close to announcing a buyer for its sportswear factories in Merseyside and Stoke-on-Trent which will save more than 100 jobs in the UK. The manufacturing facilities were another casualty of Umbro's financial woes.

The Football Association had originally awarded Umbro a new £50m contract to supply the England team's kit for the next four years, to run after its current contract comes up for renewal in July 1999. Growing concerns about the group's financial stability put that

decision in doubt. Industry sources believe the deal is all but done.

Umbro, which is owned by Stone Manufacturing, a family-run American sportswear business, will now be run operationally from the UK, although it will retain a board in the US. The group paid the penalty for expanding too fast which knocked a hole in its cash-flow. The American division made a sizeable loss last year, although its UK business remains profitable.

Umbro has secured the support of its bankers during its difficult trading period and denied rumours that it had been forced to pursue bankruptcy proceedings in the US.

Manchester United, which also uses Umbro's kit, said yesterday that it was keen to retain the group's services. Martin Edwards, the club's chief executive, said: "We are happy with Umbro. We have a contract with them for the next four years and do not see any problem with that."

Umbro is now looking to take advantage of the rapid growth in the European sports market. It also pledged £500,000 yesterday to help England bid to host the World Cup in 2006. It has thrown its weight behind a multi-million campaign that is also being endorsed by British Airways, Littlewoods, Marks & Spencer and Nationwide.



Kitted out: Manchester United said its contract with Umbro would continue

Central Bank squabbles likely to dominate European get-together

Diane Coyle, Economics Editor, previews the meeting of finance ministers

centre for financial restructuring, intended to create a network of technical assistance in areas such as accountancy and law.

Against the background of a planned rally by Euro-sceptic organisations, the main issue on the European front will be increasing competition and completing the single market in financial services. Mr Brown will urge structural reform of the capital and goods markets to guarantee the success of the

single European currency. Other items on the agenda include the extension of EU membership to the countries of central and eastern Europe, and the spillover from the Asian crisis to the European economy.

The real excitement is likely to take place in the margins of the meeting, with the continuing wrangle over who should head the ECB. The candidacy of the initial front-runner, Wim

Duisenberg of the Netherlands, was called into question when the French proposed Jean-Claude Trichet, governor of the Banque de France.

The French also insisted

earlier this week that three of

the six seats on the ECB board should be reserved for Germany, France and Italy. This has upset the Spanish, while the UK is unhappy that it has not won a guaranteed seat when it eventually joins.

Next week the European

Commission and the European Monetary Institute—founding member of the ECB—will publish their reports on

whether aspirants have met

Six months ago, this week's gathering was seen as the key meeting for making the decisions on which countries could join EMU and at what rates their national currencies would be exchanged for euros from 1 January 1999.

Next week the European

Commission and the

European Monetary Institute—founding member of the ECB—will publish their reports on

whether aspirants have met

the criteria set out in the Maastricht Treaty.

The Commission is expect-

ed to rubber-stamp the politi-

cians' conclusion that there will

be 11 members in the first

wave, only Denmark, Greece,

Sweden and the UK remaining

outside. The EMU might raise

doubts over whether Italy has

genuinely achieved convergence

with the other economies.

Among academics and in the

financial markets, the presumption

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27/UNIT TRUSTS

THE INDEPENDENT
SATURDAY 21 MARCH 1998

27

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to be increased by around 50 per cent over longer than private companies work in the first few years. In the latter half of the 111 Decades, the plan is considered by Mr. President. He is to save the network privatized.

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Marconi, the defense contractor, is about to part company with Jonathan Atkin, its former chief executive, whom it hired only a few weeks ago as a consultant and arms sales, he company said yesterday.

Mr. Atkin, who was arrested this week in connection with perjury allegations, is appointed on a short contract to handle a project which was almost complete.

It declined to comment whether his prospects had been affected by the week's developments. However, a spokesman for GEC's reputation was not clearly clean. As a result, the company, we have to say, is straightforwardly unable always, because success depends on our reputation.

Mr. Atkin was questioned for four hours on the day of the allegations against him last year against

Marconi and Grammer UK. His teenage daughter, who would have been on his behalf, was questioned the previous day.

Although his appointment was confirmed by GEC two weeks ago, it is understood he has been working for several months. He is believed to have been advising a client targeted at Marconi.

Sources say the project only weeks from completion, and that there was no intention to retain Mr. Atkin for further consultancy work.

They acknowledge that the best legal development would have made him a source of potential embarrassment to the company.

One source said: "It was believed that those who would bring suit against the pic in the future, but he was concerned that he was trying to get his client to explore every avenue."

Mr. Atkin, 42, has been a partner in a law firm for 18 years, and has been working for a number of clients from

Category	Name	Units	Price	Yield	Dividends	Rating	Rank
UK Equity Growth							
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,062	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	1
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,072	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	2
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,082	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	3
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,092	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	4
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,102	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	5
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,112	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	6
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,122	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	7
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,132	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	8
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,142	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	9
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,152	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	10
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,162	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	11
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,172	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	12
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,182	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	13
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,192	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	14
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,202	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	15
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,212	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	16
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,222	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	17
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,232	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	18
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,242	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	19
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,252	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	20
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,262	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	21
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,272	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	22
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,282	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	23
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,292	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	24
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,302	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	25
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,312	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	26
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,322	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	27
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,332	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	28
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,342	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	29
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,352	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	30
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,362	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	31
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,372	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	32
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,382	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	33
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,392	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	34
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,402	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	35
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,412	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	36
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,422	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	37
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,432	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	38
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,442	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	39
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,452	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	40
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,462	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	41
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,472	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	42
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,482	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	43
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,492	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	44
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,502	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	45
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,512	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	46
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,522	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	47
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,532	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	48
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,542	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	49
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,552	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	50
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,562	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	51
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,572	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	52
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,582	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	53
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,592	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	54
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,602	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	55
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,612	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	56
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,622	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	57
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,632	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	58
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,642	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	59
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,652	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	60
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,662	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	61
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,672	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	62
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,682	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	63
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,692	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	64
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,702	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	65
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,712	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	66
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,722	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	67
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,732	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	68
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,742	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	69
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,752	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	70
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,762	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	71
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,772	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	72
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,782	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	73
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,792	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	74
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,802	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	75
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,812	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	76
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,822	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	77
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,832	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	78
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,842	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	79
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,852	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	80
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,862	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	81
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,872	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	82
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,882	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	83
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,892	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	84
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,902	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	85
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,912	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	86
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,922	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	87
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,932	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	88
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,942	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	89
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,952	115.12	7.50	115.12	1	90
Alpha	Alpha Fund	1,962	115.1				

Jaunt in search of an elusive joint



A secret location:

Where our hungry hero, after a long and eventful hunt for banned beef on the bone, has to decide whether or not to consume it

WALTON'S Crown Imperial was playing on the taxi-driver's radio. It seemed suitably patriotic in a red-blooded English sort of way. At the door my unnameable host was waiting. He greeted me even before I could utter the password I had been preparing: "Hearts of Oak". He led me up a narrow staircase to an upper room full of solid antiques and gilded mirrors. At its centre was a long polished mahogany table, set with silver and tall-stemmed glasses. This was the place. I handed over my bottle of Gevrey-Chambertin in confirmation.

I had arrived in the lair of the secret beef-on-the-bone eaters. It had not been easy to track them down. I had begun at Butcher's Hall, the headquarters of the Backbone Party, which the City's leading catering firm, Chester Boyd, founded earlier this year to fight the regulations that now prevent it from serving the massive 70lb baron of beef which has been traditional there since AD975. "No, it's not us," said its managing director, Charles Boyd. "We're a pressure group, not a dining club." He offered me a Backbone badge, an executive stress-ball in the shape of a cow, and a copy of his new poster - "Should it be illegal to enjoy an occasional joint?" - which he hopes to place in the nation's butchers' shop-windows.

But, no, I wanted to meet those most stalwart of Englishmen, those who could stomach anything except authority. So I moved on. But the

Beef-on-the-Bone Science and Industry Forum proved no more productive. It turned out to be another respectable lobbying coalition to be launched next week under the aegis of Lord Willoughby de Broke, who led the peers' revolt in which the House of Lords demanded that the beef-on-the-bone be revoked. (No avail: the Government ignored the vote). I moved on again, casting out messages in all directions. Then came the phone call I had been waiting for. A voice I did not recognise asked whether I wanted access to the hard-core meat. I did. A tryst was made. The time and the place, of course, were secret. (I nearly blew it on the night when I alighted from the taxi and asked two patrolling policemen for directions: they courteously offered to escort me, inquiring whether there was something interesting on there that night). I shook them off with faint excuses and ten minutes later was in the upper room where the table was laid for a group of dissidents who included a butcher, a chef, a QC, two solicitors, a scientist and a vet - beefeaters to a man.

There were opening pleasantries over the smoked haddock and Chablis but this was mere foreplay. Even before the plates from the first course were cleared the door opened and a four-boned wing-rib of beef - the prime part of the sirloin - was borne in by a liveried flunkey. The moment of truth had arrived. No one can accuse me of

not being open-minded. By way of an *hors d'oeuvre* I had earlier been to the BSE inquiry where Dr Richard Lacey, the professor of clinical microbiology at Leeds University, and the Jeremiah of the beef industry, had been giving evidence. Lacey was the man who predicted doom and was ignored. Yet every measure he had demanded to combat the crisis had been implemented, though in each case, only years after he had recommended it. When I arrived he was in the middle of warning the inquiry that the Government was confirming its history of "fabrication", "suppression", and "serious omission" over BSE.

The true figures on new cases, he claimed, were probably much higher

than was being admitted. My forthcoming dinner was beginning to sound like a bad idea. I approached the wispy-haired professor during the coffee break for a more accurate risk assessment. "There can't be one," he said bluntly. "We just don't have the information." Lacey does not himself eat beef: "there are alternatives," he said, curiously. "But it is infinitely less dangerous now than it was before. The beef-on-the-bone ban came too late. It's pointless. There's far less risk now."

So what was his message to the clandestine diners? "Everyone has the right to poison themselves if they want to. If I was told I couldn't have the occasional cigar, I'd be annoyed."

I thought about him as the great joint of meat was set upon the table. "What is it?" asked the butcher. "Aberdeen Angus cross," said the chef. He began to carve succulent slices. The meat was delectably red to the bottom of the slice, not surrounded by a circle of browned meat, as it is with a boneless joint. "Off-the-bone joints are less juicy, less tender, more shrivelled," he explained. "On the bone the heat comes from one side only. It improves the tenderness. With heat the fibres in the muscle contract and bunch. The bone keeps them stretched, which tenderises the meat." Before the ban only 5 per cent of beef was sold on the bone. "But it was the quality end of the

market," said the butcher. "Some 83 per cent of meat is sold from supermarkets, almost all off the bone. But with high-class butchers 15 to 20 per cent of our trade is on the bone. The demand comes from foodies, traditionalists and from ethnic groups, Koreans and Caribbeans, in my case."

The conversation turned to the law and whether or not the defence was likely to succeed in the case of Jim Sutherland, the Scottish hotelier who has become the first person prosecuted under the Beef Bones Regulations 1997. When he comes to court on 6 April he will argue, said a lawyer, that there were irregularities in the consultation process the Ministry of Agriculture



Red in tooth and maw: The object of the author's search, holding centre stage during the illicit banquet

Photograph: John Voos

should have followed before bringing the regulations into force. "Quite right," said the butcher, "the National Federation of Meat and Food Traders received the regulations on a Friday afternoon and had to submit a response by the Monday."

The first plate of glistening pink beef was placed before me. Just before the dinner I had phoned Jim Sutherland in Scotland. I had been wary of these boney beefeaters. The stuff they had written in the right-wing newspapers was all wild libertarian stuff about blood sports, the Countryside March, Britain's noble history, the riots in Edinburgh after the 1725 tax upon malt and what we fought two world wars for.

But Sutherland was a measured chap who had the grace to acknowledge that the right to be able to chose to eat beef on the bone was relatively insignificant in the scale of human freedoms but none the less worth sticking out for. "If these regulations had been brought in when the scares were at their height I wouldn't have opposed them," he said. "But at the time they were introduced it seemed on the Government's own figures that the BSE epidemic was all but passed. In that circumstance there was no manifest danger. It all seems an unnecessary restriction on the liberty of the individual. If we all went through life assuming the worst, we'd never do anything," he added. "Government scientists admit, using a series of pessimistic assumptions, that there is about a 1 in 1.2 billion chance you'd contract CJD from beef on the bone. You've more chance of being hit by a meteorite. I think you'll be safe enough eating it." So I did.

I even ate the banana brûlée afterwards which, loaded with cream, presumably fell into the category of the 10,000 things which Jim Sutherland had warned me I did every day without thinking and yet which were actually more dangerous than eating beef.

But then - as the bones were discreetly taken away in a plastic carrier - I produced my cigar case and offered them round. There were no takers. "Genuine Habanas, hand-imported," I blustered. But I smoked alone. Now, evidently, I had gone too far.



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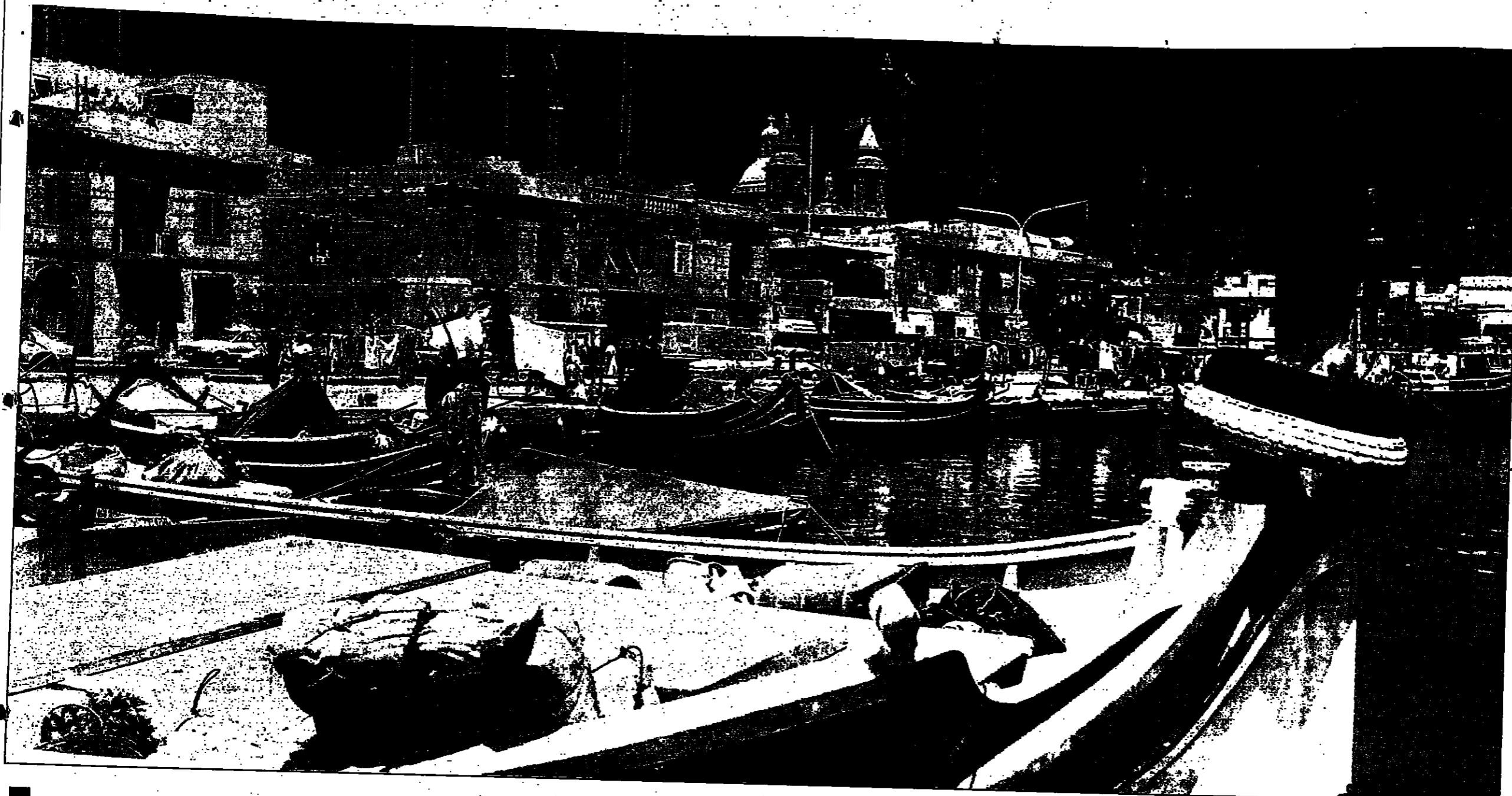
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TIME OFF

TRAVEL, LEISURE & SPORT

Saturday 21 March 1998



Journey to the centre of the Med

In Malta you cross paths with many civilizations – and their relics. Cleo Paskal gets lost among the island's catacombs while failing to find a bowling alley

"Well, how about going to see some catacombs?" suggested my pal Gino. It was not the sort of lazy, late-afternoon activity I was used to – but this was Malta, a country so choked with history that it is easier to find an ancient, important grave site than, say, a bowling alley. And I didn't really feel bowling, anyway.

"Sure." We trundled along one of Malta's dusty back roads in Gino's Jeep. In the fading light I could see classic Maltese scenery: earth, shrubs, low limestone houses, all in various shades of yellowing brown. Beyond, constantly clutching at the beaches and cliffs, the dark blue sea. It was oddly timeless. And beautiful.

Gino suddenly pulled over to the side of the road. "We're here."

I looked around. Earth, shrubs, low limestone houses.

Gino got out and I followed him across a field, up a low ridge and through someone's back yard. Just beyond it, the side of a hill had been carved way, showing several openings into the rock face. Gino went into one of them.

It was starting to get dark. I began to wonder exactly how much I really knew about Gino, the Maltese cousin of a good friend from London. At his cousin's request, Gino had offered to be my guide, but, as far as I remembered, luring me into tombs that night hadn't been part of the deal.

"You coming?" he shouted, his voice echoing inside the hill. I went.

The opening was a low doorway. I stepped over

the threshold and down into the sunken chamber. I was in a hallway, with alcoves on either side. Some were too dark to see into, but the others were unquestionably designed to hold bodies.

There were waist-high slabs and central fire pits for visitors who wanted to spend a cold winter evening in the company of the dear departed. It was ancient and eerie but strangely welcoming – a reminder of a time when life and death weren't so far apart.

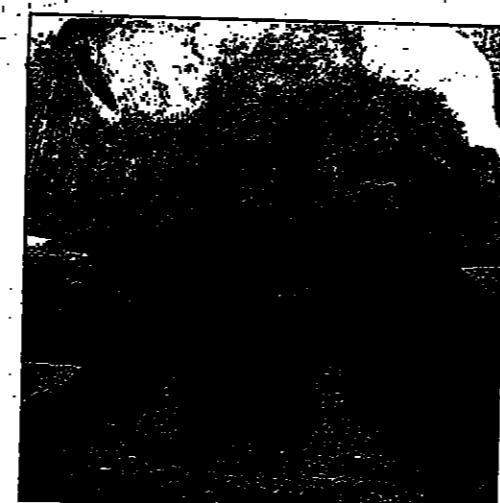
Gino pointed out details. From carvings on the walls, you could tell that the site had been used by Christians and Jews, together. Most of the catacomb was accessible, but some of the other openings into the rock face were barred.

Soon it was too dark to see any more, and we returned to the Jeep.

I was amazed. Given how interesting the site was, why was there no security? Why wasn't it mentioned in guidebooks? Why was there no information available on site? "Welcome to Malta," said Gino, by way of explanation.

Because of its strategic position, everybody who was anybody had controlled Malta. The Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Castilians, Knights of St John, French – and, yes, the British – have all left their mark, literally. You can't find a more condensed and varied collection of archaeological sites.

That leaves little room for modern Malta to manoeuvre. Every new house, road, factory and farm is potentially destroying something of unique historical importance. Along the way towards the fut-



ure, bits of the past are sacrificed. This catacomb, an eddy in the current of time, isn't important enough to save.

So what are the Maltese saving? Well, unlike Gino, many of the Maltese who grew up playing hide-and-seek on World Heritage sites don't realize their unique inheritance. And those who do realize it wonder why their nation of 350,000 should have to shoulder alone the financial burden of maintaining sites of world importance.

As a result, in spite of some devoted Maltese and an increasing number of supportive foreigners, the archaeological sites of Malta are in a precarious state. One of the most famous, the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, an enormous underground burial complex carved out of the rock, has already been closed to the public after tragic damage caused by decades of mismanagement.

But there are still more than enough mind-blowing open sites to lure you away from the beaches. After my outing with Gino, I went out of my way to visit as many as possible. Their accessibility and

range became addictive, and soon my day in Malta wasn't complete unless I had seen a temple, a catacomb, or a beautiful piece of prehistoric architecture.

The most impressive for me was Ggantija Temples, on Gozo. From the car park, I walked through farm fields along a dirt track until suddenly, on a slight rise to the right, there they were. Two enormous Neolithic twin temples, 1,000 years older than the pyramids at Giza. Constructed from massive blocks of limestone, some weighing more than 50 tons, they made Stonehenge look like a random collection of pebbles.

The temple roofs were gone, allowing a clear view of the floor plan. Designed to honour a voluptuous fertility goddess with wide hips and large bosom, they looked, from above, roughly like a drawing of two snowmen side by side, the bottom circle representing the hips, the middle circle the breasts, and the top one the head.

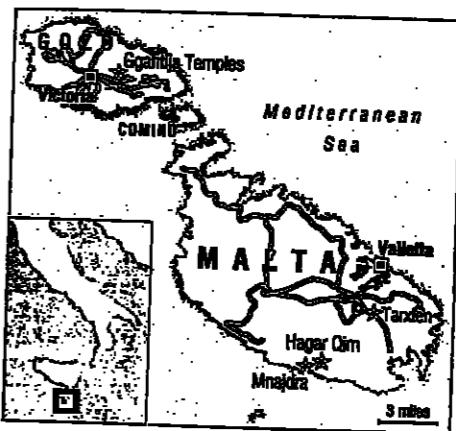
As with all Maltese sites, you could walk right into the temples: I let my imagination run riot, smelling the scorched flesh while looking at the burnt stones in the animal sacrifice area, listening for the whispers of guidance at the oracle hole, pretending to pour liquid offerings (I chose water rather than blood) into the libation holes.

Other temples offered different imaginary fodder. Tarxien Temples, on Malta itself, have astounding carvings. Mnajdra Temples, also on Malta, feature solar alignment, making a huge prehistoric calendar. Hagar Qim's towering reconstructed facade makes you feel the weight of belief.

Hopefully, as more tourists tear themselves away from the bikinis on the beaches to see the voluptuous goddesses of the temples, the Maltese Government will find the momentum and the money to make the country's past part of its future. And with any luck, the next time I see Gino, I will still be able to creep around the catacombs rather than go bowling.

All aboard: Malta's living fishing heritage, above; and prehistoric remains at Tarxien temple, left

Photograph: Britstock-IFA/ Habel and Robert Harding Picture Library



Making for Malta

Cleo Paskal travelled to Malta using some spare Air Miles. For fare-paying passengers, Air Malta (081-795 317) flies from several UK airports to Malta. Fares from Gatwick and Heathrow for the summer start at £189 including tax. Departures from Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow are slightly more expensive. You may find lower fares through an Air Malta subsidiary, Malta Direct Travel (081-785 3223). GB Airways, an affiliate of British Airways (0845 22211), operates daily from Gatwick. The Malta Tourist Office is at 36-38 Piccadilly, London W1V 0PP (071-292 4900).

INSIDE PARIS

48 hours on the Seine/3

GARDENING

Hothouse beauties/11

SPORT

TENNIS

Eight who changed the game/18

FOOTBALL

Jamaica's jamboree/22

RUGBY UNION

England's Lion king/26

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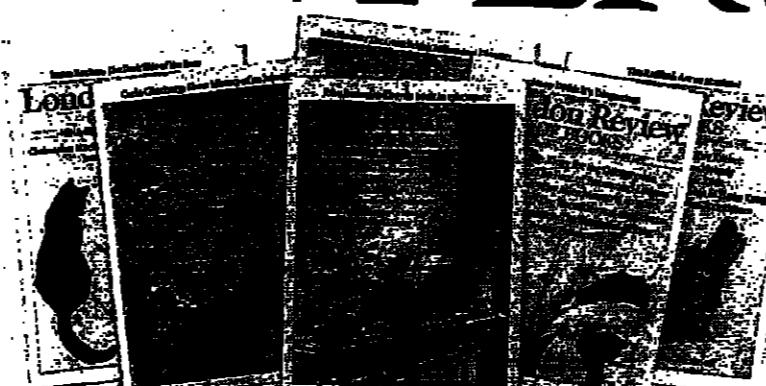
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ENGAGING THE MIND





SIMON CALDER

If you were planning to travel to France yesterday, you may have found out the hard way that duty-free sales within the European Union are due to end in July 1999. French ferry workers blockaded Calais and the entrance to the Channel Tunnel in protest at the EU proposal, saying their jobs are threatened.

They are, no doubt, partly correct. Some ferry services across the Channel will probably end when Brussels closes the loophole next summer. And, in the full knowledge that this will inflame the powerful pro-duty-free lobby, I wholeheartedly applaud the EU's move.

I say this as a European citizen who has happily smoked and drunk for most of his adult life, but finds the crazy economics of cross-Channel links indefensible.

On a Eurostar train from Kent to Calais, as with any intra-EU rail service, there is no opportunity to buy duty-free goods. Yet on Le Shuttle, the car-carrying service through the Channel Tunnel, I am encouraged to buy alcohol and tobacco at well below the usual price. In a single market, this is as ridiculous as being able to avoid duty on a journey between Coventry and Cardiff.

The position on the ferries is even more absurd. Earlier this year, the culmination of irrational pricing was reached when HoverSpeed began paying motorists and their passengers to travel between Dover and Calais. The company could drive a high-speed ferry through the economics of transport purely because it sells booze and fags at such high profit margins.

People spend so much on alcohol and tobacco that the shipping companies can make more from duty-free sales than from ticket revenues. It is worthwhile burning expensive fuel for the benefit of those who have no interest in France beyond the nearest hypermarket.

So who is paying for this? The ferry companies, and their allies in the Duty-Free Confederation such as the airlines, airports and tobacco companies, like to portray duty-free sales as a victimless perk. In reality, of course, you and I are bearing the cost. The value that the Treasury would otherwise earn from the drink and cigarettes is effectively being transferred to the shopper, who then splits the profits with the operator.

The duty-free lobby says that this is a flawed argument: many of the sales would simply not take place if duty-free were abolished. But in the case of tobacco, this is surely a good thing? The high tax on cigarettes is explained by its deterrent value, and the need to contribute to the costs of health care for smokers.

I defend the rights of the smoker, but equally society has a right to expect the smoker to bear the consequences of his or her actions. The duty-free lobby would have us believe that they are doing the world a favour by selling a dangerous drug cheaply. If ending duty-free sales helps save the life of just one person who would otherwise die from a smoking-related illness, that alone surely justifies the action.

For the next 15 months, the hot air emitted by the Duty-Free Confederation will be matched only by the fumes pouring from ferries full of booze-cruisers. From 1 July next year, though, I hope shipping companies will get back to their real business, the safe carriage of people and cargo.



Mother and child revolution

Family travels: often there's a Great Wall between parents and their offspring. But Louise Jury and her mother enjoyed a cultural reunion on a trip to China

You learn a lot about other people and their families when you announce you're going on holiday with your mum. Some friends express amazement that you could contemplate such a thing, as if the prospect of travel *en famille* appalls them. Others appear impressed by such signs of parental pluckiness.

All that worried my mum was whether I could conceivably have a good time with her. "Are you sure?" she asked repeatedly. "Of course," I said – and we did.

The choice of trip was essential. We wanted it to be somewhere completely different from Britain, a hol-

iday of a lifetime for someone who has had few opportunities to travel. But there were factors to bear in mind. We wanted to avoid places too hot, as my mum is a fair-skinned redhead and inclined to keel over in the sun. We preferred somewhere with ancient ruins and grand sights to keep us busy, rather than beaches and bars alone.

Although my mother is quite young, I contemplated some of the less comfortable journeys in my travel history and decided that some of them might not be appropriate in this particular case: overnight public bus trips half-way across Turkey, with the inevitable dodgy tummy and a bus driver inclined to let his hands wander all over you if you misguidedly sit behind him; a tiring journey to Auschwitz in a train with a failed heating system, one particularly freezing April.

My mum deserved a more conventionally enjoyable time than that, I thought. Missing a train and having to kip down in a station may be fine for the hardy traveller, but it was not the kind of ordeal I thought she should have to endure. And I wanted it to be something extra special for her, a holiday to enjoy and to remember.

And, as I anticipated, my mum and I got on just fine. The only conversation even approaching a dispute will be familiar to anyone who also has

completely selfless and overly-reasonable parents. "What would you like to do?" I'd ask. "Oh, I don't mind, whatever you would like to do," Mum replies. "Well, we could do X,

Glancing through a selection of the brochures, I quickly ruled out some of the dodgy options. Egypt was slightly risky in the wake of Tahrir and I've been there, apparently. Sri Lanka with temperatures rarely dipping under 80 degrees was out. The people of Australia speak English (sort of) and most look much too Western. After a lot of thought and deliberation, we made up our minds. We plumped for China.

Although it is slowly opening up to the West, many seasoned adventurers of my acquaintance have not explored that far. Those who have been there spoke of the nightmares of Chinese bureaucracy for independent travellers. All things considered, joining an organised party seemed a good bet.

We were immediately welcomed into the arms of a group of people mostly in their 50s and 60s, with the odd honeymoon couple and widowed 71-year-old thrown in. Although most of them were couples, our mother and daughter combination fitted in perfectly.

And, as I anticipated, my mum and I got on just fine. The only conversation even approaching a dispute will be familiar to anyone who also has

Y or Z." "Whatever you think, I'll fit in with you. It's all new to me," she says, wanting to be 100 per cent agreeable and totally reasonable. Just occasionally, I fancied banging my head against the wall under the pressure of the decision-making – and her

wall to take a picture of the front. At the sight of the Terracotta Warriors at Xian we both gazed in stunned amazement at the massed ranks of life-size clay-soldiers. In Suzhou, a beautiful town of gardens and canals, we collapsed in hysterical giggles as two elderly Chinese women tried to sell us hideous live and wriggling shrimp-like things. Back in Beijing, we caught a cab downtown together for a well-deserved, and enjoyable, night out with the locals.

My mum says she would never have thought of going to China on her own, so was thrilled when I suggested we go. It was even better that I took all the hassle of making the arrangements out of her hands (not as selfless as it seems as I have done far more travelling than she has). "It was great, because you looked after me and did everything," she says.

Which, I'm afraid to say, is a very easy thing to do when your mum's as lovely as mine is.

Louise Jury and her mother paid £1,495 each through Travelsphere Holidays (01858 410456) for two weeks in China. The price included transport, accommodation (mainly four-star hotels), meals and guided tours, and a visit to the Peking Opera.



Good relations: China's umbrella, the Great Wall (top); Louise Jury and her mother on the wall (above)

Photograph (top): Xinhua

RED CHANNEL

Surcharges in Slovakia

"The system of charging for baggage on Slovakian public transport appears to be a nationwide obsession; we were even charged a small baggage fee on our Eurolines bus home although we had return tickets, including free baggage transport."

"We were caught out on Bratislava's trams going to the bus station. Having virtuously purchased and stamped our own tickets, we were dismayed when an inspector demanded two tickets for our packs."

"Because we were suspicious about the fine, he

took us to the main vending kiosk outside the station, where there was a tiny chart indicating a charge of 3 krona [about 5 pence] for each large bag. With our passports confiscated, we had to go to the police station, where they demanded a whopping 1,400 krona fine [over £25].

"Eventually we beat them down to half that amount, but it still hit us hard in the pocket and was an unpleasant experience."

Letter from Sarah O'Mahony and Daniel Stuckey, in 'Planet Talk', the free newsletter from Lonely Planet (0171-428 4300).

GREEN CHANNEL

As Science Week draws to a close, you may have come to realise that science is much more than Bunsen burners and test tubes. Perhaps inevitably, it has even become incorporated into holidays.

Several organisations organise working holidays with a large scientific and conservation component. The Earthwatch Institute is one of the largest funders of scientific field research in the world. But as well as having real scientists working on its projects around the world, ordinary non-scientists with just a healthy supply of money,

curiosity and willingness to work can take part in their scientific trips.

Join an Earthwatch team (which costs between £400 and £2,000 for an average two-week expedition), and you can choose from projects world-wide, such as working with an Indonesian scientist to introduce solar technology to villages in Lombok Island, East Bali.

Coral Cay Conservation is another organisation for the casual amateur scientist, who can also bask in the waters of beautiful coral reefs. CCC volunteers pay between £650 for two weeks

and £2,550 for two months. Work involves scuba-diving to conduct survey work on the reefs of Turneffe Atoll, in Belize, for instance – carefully guided by marine scientists. All information will be used to establish a management plan for the atoll, with the aim of protecting its precious marine life. There are also projects in the Philippines and Borneo.

For an "alternative" scientific holiday, why not Wwoof? Working Weekends on Organic Farms, or Wwoofing, is an increasingly popular cheap way of

travelling and learning about all things organic. In exchange for providing labour, Wwoofers get first-hand experience of organic techniques, healthy meals, and a place to lay their sleeping-bags. You can Wwoof for a weekend or for several months, in the UK and about 50 other countries. Wwoofing is also proof that a science holiday does not have to empty your wallet. A subscription payment of £10 for one or two people travelling together lets you work anywhere in Britain and southern Europe, and allows

you access to information about Wwoofing worldwide.

Earthwatch Institute, 57 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JU (01865 311600) <http://www.earthwatch.org> E-mail: info@earthwatch.org

Coral Cay Conservation, 154 Clapham Park Road, London SW4 7DE (0171 498 6248), www.coralcay.org E-mail: ccc@coralcay.demon.co.uk

Wwoof, PO Box 2675, Lewes BN7 1RB (01273 476286).

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Le Shuttle

Le Shuttle

48 hours on the Seine

Get to the heart of Paris in the spring by exploring its main artery. Natasha Edwards offers a riverbound guide to the city

Why go now?
The Seine is the lifeblood of Paris: it is not simply its historic heart, where the first settlement was founded 2,000 years ago; it is also the focus of a new Paris, with the fast-being-built areas of Bercy and at the new Bibliothèque Nationale in the east. Besides, as the song says, "I love Paris in the springtime..."

Beam down
Eurostar (0345 303030) from London Waterloo and Ashford to Gare du Nord costs £69 return if you go midweek and stay away a Saturday night; £89 if you leave on a Friday. For these fares you need to book three days in advance. An un-restricted ticket costs £179.

For specimen fares on some of the many air routes from the UK to Paris, the following airlines were called and asked for quotes departing the UK on 3 April and returning 6 April: Air France (0181-742 6600) from Birmingham £169.40; British Midland (0345 554554) or British Airways (0345 222111) from Heathrow £122.50; BA from Manchester £123.50.

Get your bearings
You should have no problem finding your way here. The Seine runs through the centre of Paris, dividing the city both physically and psychologically between Rive Gauche (Left Bank) and Rive Droite (Right Bank), with the île de la Cité and île-Saint-Louis swimming in the middle. Numerous bridges link the two banks, and though some sections resemble an autoroute, cobbled verges mean that you can walk beside the river in much of central Paris.

For aerial views, Métro line 6 crosses the Seine above ground both west (Pont Bir-Hakeim) and east (Pont de Bercy), while line 5 crosses the Seine at Gare d'Austerlitz; or head for the riverside department store La Samaritaine, which has an open-air viewing terrace on the 11th floor.

Check in
Among the antique shops of quai Voltaire is the old-fashioned Hôtel du Quai Voltaire (00 33 1 42 61 50 91) at No 19, where Oscar Wilde, Sibelius and Pissarro stayed. A double room, 690FF, could be noisy; sound-proofing is to come next year.

One hotel where you certainly won't see the Seine, but you will be right in the centre of it, is the Hôtel du Jeu de Paume (00 33 1 43 26 14 18) at 54 rue St-Louis-l'Île, the main street of the aristocratic île St-Louis. The hotel was originally a jeu de paume or real tennis court, built in the 1630s, and was brilliantly converted a decade ago. The beamed court is now a dramatic, galleried breakfast room, while the bedrooms offer plenty of creature comforts.

Double room 1,230FF-1,385FF
Not quite on the Seine, but great for those on student budgets, the MJC hostel Le Fourey (00 33 1 42 74 23 45) at 6 rue de Fourey in the Marais offers pleasant hostel accommodation in a lovely 17th-century *hôtel particulier* (from 125FF for a bed in a dormitory to 198FF for a single room).

Take a ride
... on a Bateau Mouche (00 33 40 76 99 99), the largest of the tour boats that chug up and down the Seine. A one-hour trip will show you most of the city's main sights. Take in the Eiffel Tower across the river as you board at Pont de l'Alma.

Boats head off downstream past the Trocadéro and the circular Maison de la Radio on the Right Bank. Catch a glimpse of Passy – this now rather snooty part of Paris was still a rustic village when Balzac lived here in the 19th century; it was originally a spa noted for the curative powers of its springs. Many Parisians perversely preferred the dubious delights of drinking the water of the Seine (one theory to explain this being a confusion between the words Seine and *saïne* – meaning healthy).

As the boat passes the narrow Allée des Cygnes island, look out for the Statue of Liberty (reduced size) sticking up at the end, a reminder that she was sculpted by a Frenchman – Auguste Bartholdi – as a gift to New York.

The boat turns round here and heads upstream to take in several of the city's greatest sights: the Eiffel Tower, the ornate Pont Alexandre III, the

such as steak and chips or rabbit in mustard.

Cultural afternoon
With the Louvre, Musée d'Orsay, Institut du Monde Arabe and Palais de Chaillot all en

here on their way to the guillotine, among them Marie-Antoinette, Damion and Robespierre. In the Chapelle des Grondins are Marie-Antoinette's crucifix and a guillotine blade. The reconstructed cells

An aperitif
Take your aperitif on a boat while heading upstream for a slice of new Paris, where a little nucleus of floating music bars has moored on quai de la Gare in front of the vast Bibliothèque Nationale François Mitterrand, the new national library. Much the most romantic, and the most incongruous, is the Guinguette Pirate, a three-masted Chinese junk that sailed over to Paris from the Far East a few years ago. There's live music on deck most evenings.

Demure dinner
Make for St-Germain-des-Prés and the extremely successful Les Bookinistes (00 33 1 43 25 45 94) at 53 quai des Grands-Augustins, the best of five moderately priced offshoots run by superchef Guy Savoy. The dining-room is chic and contemporary – amber walls, wacky modern mirror frames – and the modern French cooking is original and stylishly presented.

Sunday morning go to church
Notre Dame on île de la Cité is, of course, one of the most visited sights in France, but two of Paris's finest medieval churches are also nearby, in the Latin Quarter.

The little church of St-Julien-le-Pauvre overlooks the Seine and Notre Dame from a small garden. The outside is rather dilapidated, but the interior still has its richly decorated late-12th-century capitals among the icons – it is now used by the Greek Melchite community. St-Séverin is a late-Gothic gem, famed for its double ambulatory and unique double-spiral column.

Bracing brunch
Back on board for a leisurely brunch on *La Caffè* (00 33 1 43 54 50 04). Brunch is still viewed

golden dome of Les Invalides and the Musée d'Orsay on the Left Bank; the Grand Palais, Tuileries gardens and Louvre on the Right.

Lunch on the run
Stop off at Le Rallye (01 43 54 29 65), a rough-and-tumble riverside *café-tabac* at 11 quai de la Tournelle, with an authentic Fifties mirror and a plastic interior crammed with Timin memorabilia. There's nothing fancy here, but it is a true local in the heart of Paris. Sit in the smoky inside, or outside at a pavement table, for an inexpensive beer or glass of wine, sandwiches or a hot *plat du jour*

route, you are not short of culture, but instead head for the turrets of the Conciergerie (1 quai de l'Hôpital) (00 33 1 53 73 78 50) – the Paris equivalent of the Tower of London – for an insight into French history at the city's first royal palace and later revolutionary prison. You enter straight into the echoey, Gothic vaulted halls of the Salle des Gardes and Salle des Gens d'Armes, built in the early 14th century by Philippe Le Bel, leading to a medieval kitchen with massive fireplaces. Later the palace became a prison, at its most notorious under the Terror when thousands of victims of the Revolution passed

give a pretty good idea of what lingers here involved, but money clearly helped; the poor slept on straw crowded in communal cells, while the well-off could pay for a private cell and such luxuries as a desk and bed.

Shop in a box
For quintessential riverside shopping go to the *bouquinistes* – the second-hand book, print and postcard dealers identified by their bottle-green boxes attached to the parapets of the quays. They stretch along both sides of the Seine in central Paris, perfect for buying a *série noire* crime novel or that old *Byrrh* advertisement.

HIGH ROAD

Swoosh away to the sauropods. Next Friday, the world's largest dinosaur exhibition opens at the Philadelphia Civic Center. Quest Worldwide (0181-546 6000) is offering a fare from London, Birmingham or Manchester for £197. Admission to the exhibition is an extra \$15 (£9).

LOW ROAD

Alternatively, make do with *Dinosaurs: the Next Generation* at the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds (0990 106666). Admission to the special event and the permanent attractions costs £6.95 for adults and £5.25 for under 15s.



CHECK OUT

A plane

Central America opens up next weekend, when British Airways launches a new scheduled route from Gatwick to Cancún. Mexico's biggest Caribbean resort will provide a gateway for easy access to the Yucatán Peninsula, Belize, Guatemala and elsewhere in Central America. The lead-in fare direct from the airline (0345 222111) on the first flight out is an Apex ticket at £648 (inc tax), but lower fares are available through discount agents. Next weekend's *Time Off* will feature a report on Cancún itself.

A train

You could be travelling to or from Inverness for next to nothing, providing you are old enough. Great (or should that be Grey?) North Eastern Railway is offering the over-fifties vastly reduced fares on the line from London King's Cross through York to Newcastle and Scotland. The return journey from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow or Inverness to London costs £19; call 0345 225225 for bookings.

The trick, besides being born before March 1948, is to choose your dates with care; GNER insists you travel on Tuesdays or Wednesdays only.

A boat

The only way to reach Tristan da Cunha, a speck of British territory in the south Atlantic west of South Africa, is to sail aboard RMS *St Helena*, which makes an annual visit to the island. It is not cheap: flying out to Cape Town, then spending a fortnight at sea with no absolute guarantee of being able to land on Tristan da Cunha, costs at least £2,600. Book through Currow Shipping in Falmouth (01326 211466). If this sounds too demanding in terms of time and money, you can read more about the island in Harry Ritchie's book *The Last Pink Bits*, now out in paperback (Picador, £5.99).

A room

New Experience Holidays (01922 410909), which organises walking trips in Europe, does not mince words when describing the hotels it uses in the Moselle village of Alf. At the Hotel Junk, for example, you are told, the proprietor, Frau Johanna Junk, is also the local butcher: "Definitely NOT the place for vegetarians". Sadly, New Experience no longer offers a discount for customers called Alf.

A meal

Harry Ramsden's is rapidly becoming a multinational chain of fish and chip shops. But the original version at White Cross, nine miles north west of Leeds, remains a tourist attraction. To keep the interest value, the restaurant is staging a series of special events. On Monday (23 March), you can enjoy "Opera and Chips" for an all-inclusive £16.50. Book on 01943 874641.

A drink

Lamberhurst Vineyard is one of the *en route* attractions in a booklet called "Country Tours", published this week by Kent Tourism. The vineyard, near Tunbridge Wells, offers wine-tasting every day except Christmas. The bibulous theme continues with the Whitbread Hop Farm, the largest group of Victorian oasthouses in the world. Another feature of the publication is a list of more than 40 pubs belonging to the Shepherd Neame brewery. You may be surprised to learn, then, that the subtitle of the booklet (price £1, from Kent Tourism, 01622 696165) is "Circular Driving Routes in the Kent Countryside".

A week from now

... Drayton Manor Park, near Tamworth in Staffordshire, opens for the summer. Shockwave, Europe's only stand-up roller-coaster, remains the main attraction. Admission to the site costs £3 for adults, £2 for under-14s; a wrist band entitling you to unlimited rides all day costs £10 for adults and £7.50 for children up to 13 years. Call 01827 287979.

A month from now

... you could be riding across the Greenlandic wilderness, hauled by a team of huskies. Through Arctic Experience (01737 218800), £1,160 buys you flights via Reykjavik, five nights' accommodation, and transport in a sled driven by a professional.

A year from now

... you may experience better weather in Barbados than England's cricketers got this week. Unijet (0990 114114) offers a fortnight at the Sugar Canoe Club for £599, including flights from Gatwick or Manchester. Note that the average annual precipitation in Manchester is 35in: in Barbados, rainfall is half as much again.

Sightseeing boats on the water of Paris (above); the île de la Cité (left)
Photograph: UPPA

as an American import, but it is catching on, and this rather sophisticated barge shows why. From 1 April, the barge will be on its summer moorings on quai Montebello, where the 125FF all-you-can-eat meal includes a Mediterranean-tinged array of salads, freshly baked bread, bini, scrambled eggs and smoked salmon.

A step back in time
Sunday afternoon is the perfect moment to explore the timeless île St-Louis. This enclave remains much as it was when first built up in the 17th century, with elegant town houses and tree-lined quays. A visit is not complete without an ice-cream from Berthillon, at 31 rue St-Louis-en-l'Île (closed during the school holidays), Paris's most famous ice-cream maker, which often draws a queue way down the street.

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On your marks in Munich

As the pound hits its highest level against the German currency for nine years, Muthena Paul Alkazraji sees Bavaria's capital from his bike

What would be Germany's contribution to the global supply of "world cities" for the 21st century? Berlin, certainly; Hamburg, probably; and, to complete the Teutonic triumvirate, only Bavaria's capital can suffice. Munich's size and stature provides the touristic gravity to attract visitors, but also presents them with a bit of a problem. How best to get around a city so vast that it already possessed three orbital *Autobahnen* while the M25 was still on the drawing-board?

The 1,300km of Munich's cycle paths provide a solution, not least because they are so neatly marked and organised. If a cyclists' traffic light says "Halt", Münchener will obediently wait at a desolate pedestrian intersection until the light changes to green. An English friend living here has tried sneaking across, and been promptly ticked off by affronted citizens. Given a modest stretch of smooth Tarmac, however, and the temptation – especially among the 100,000 students at Germany's largest university – to crank up the pedal-power is frequently surrendered to with unnerving abandon. That said, Munich's wealth of historic buildings and elegant avenues, extensive gardens and gradient-free terrain make it excellent for urban cycling.

I began my trip away from the weaving lines of cyclists in the centre of Germany's "secret capital", by the Deutsches Museum on Ludwig's Bridge. My chosen route was through leafy parkland on the east bank of the river Isar, across Luitpold Bridge, right into the English Garden, and then north to the park's Kleinhesseloher See.

At the start, the wooded pathways through Maximilian's Garden, across from the Deutsches Museum, give continuous, bank's-edge views of the beautiful river Isar. It flows from its Alpine source 50km south of the city, through the heart of Munich, before spilling into the Danube near Deggendorf. Clean, gurgling and green, it runs swift and shallow around white pebble banks and islets on which flocks of black-headed gulls gather.

With a clear blue sky, and the *Föhn* wind blowing in from the Alps and warming the city up, I freewheeled along the bank, under Maximilian's Bridge by the seat of the Bavarian State Parliament, and on to Friedens Angel. This golden statue of a Greek goddess, perched on a high column overlooking the river, was built in 1871 by King Ludwig II. Now known as the "fairy-tale king", on account of his love of building romantic castles in line with Wagnerian



Bavarian beauty: view over Munich, Germany's secret capital
Photograph: Gavin Hellier/Robert Harding Picture Library

Cyclists whip across distant gaps in the chestnut trees; the green, onion-shaped domes on the towers of the Frauenkirche top the city's skyline.

From the Monopteros, I pedalled past the park's Chinese Tower, and northwards towards the Seehaus beer garden on the edge of the Kleinhesseloher See. This large, man-made lake is only a stone's throw from Schwabing, home of the city's once thriving artists' quarter (Kandinsky, Klee, Brecht). The beer garden made a suitable finishing-point for my trip and as I sat back to relax, water lapped at the edges of the wooden benches and tables arranged in ordered ranks under the swaying trees. Without a sandwich in my saddlebag, I considered sampling the Munich fare, but the thought of *Schweinshax* (pork knuckles) quelled the idea. It was tempting to try the macho Bavarian challenge of drinking a "mass" of beer. I settled, however, for half a litre, which, in a robust glass mug, seemed heavy enough, although it falls pathetically short of a local record: one muscular Munich beer-maiden carrying 27 litre glasses at once.

Such boisterous images, though, were a far cry from my gently satisfying day – a little *biking*, a little beer, in a leafy city of great architectural elegance.

Gateway to Bavaria
Getting there: the best deal to Munich at present is on Debonair (0500 146200) from Luton to Munich for £117.40 return. Lufthansa (045 737747) and British Airways (0345 222111) fly from Birmingham and Heathrow. BA also flies from Edinburgh and Gatwick, and Lufthansa from Manchester.

A more esoteric way to travel is by train, most economically achieved by using Eurostar (0345 303030) via Brussels to Cologne for £89, then one of the special evening or weekend deals promoted by German Rail (0181-390 8833) – which can get you across Germany to Munich for as little as £12 return for two people travelling together.

Getting around: in Munich a selection of cycles can be hired at Radius/Touristik, near platform 31 of the Hauptbahnhof, Munich's main railway station. Prices begin at £25 per day. Further information: the German National Tourist Office is at 65 Curzon Street, London W1 (0171-493 0080).

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Just lie back and cycle into heaven

There's a lot wrong with most bikes: the saddle, for a start. Then there's the unorthopaedic bend you have to put into your back to reach the handlebars. And, above all else, when it comes to efficiency even a lightweight racing machine has the aerodynamics of a double-decker bus once you get on board.

Which is why recumbent riders are so laid-back they're almost horizontal. It's not just a question of attitude. You really do lie back, though you're not in fact much lower than you are on a normal bike. Gone is that sick joke of a saddle, and, even more important, out on the roads, gone is the tendency to fly head first over the handlebars, as you do when your bike hits something at speed.

By taking the good bits of a bike (wheels, pedals and chain), and arranging them in a sensible way, designers of the recumbent version have created a format that looks bizarre, even unreliable, but works beautifully. Though there are lots of varieties of recumbent bike, the common factor is that the pedals are out in front rather than beneath you, allowing a relaxed sitting-back posture which is also efficient for turning the pedals. All your body weight is supported on a mix sun lounger, so neck, spine, wrists, hands and backside don't suffer the contortions and pounding that they do on a conventional bicycle. Handlebars, positioned either above your lap or beneath the seat, are there for steering and operating the controls, not for leaning down on or pulling up on.

With that many differences, riding a recumbent is definitely a new skill

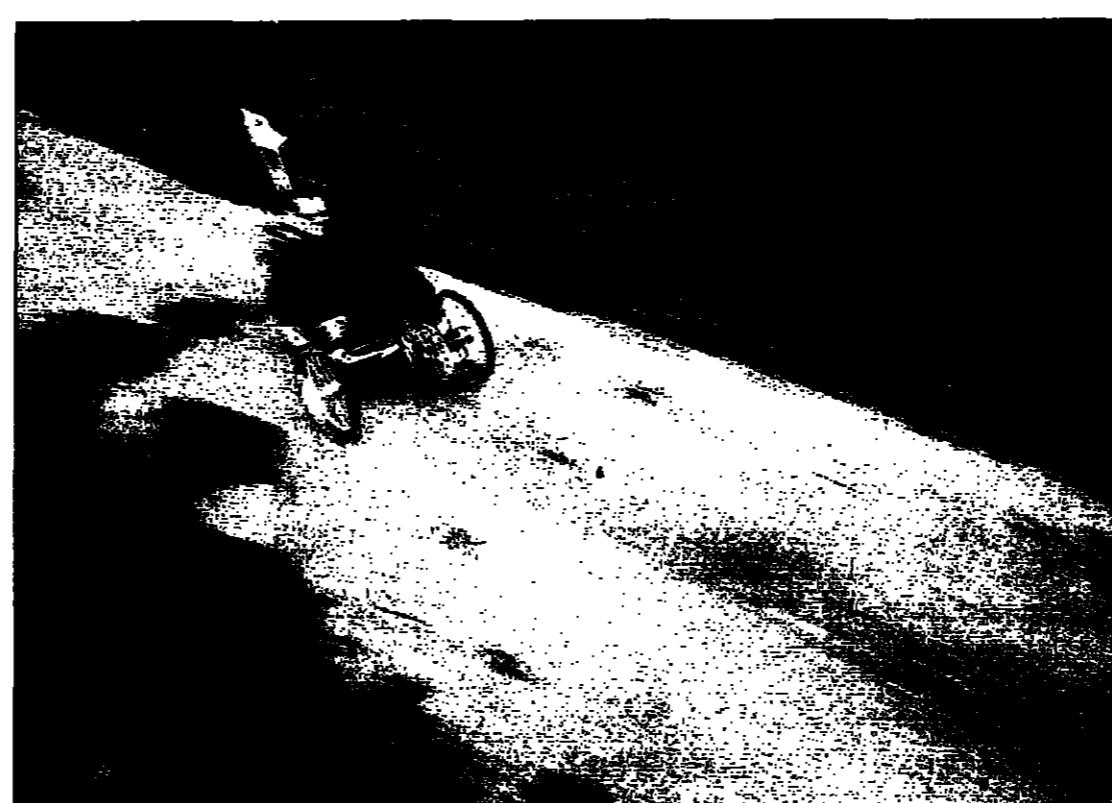
to grasp. The closer you get to one, the more you wonder whether some hideous joke is being played on you by the rest of the world. From swinging your leg over to falling off, everything is unfamiliar – there's not even much to hold on to while wheeling it to a quiet stretch of driveway for a tentative first go.

The process of learning to ride a bike, for most of us, happened too long ago to recall in detail, and it's probably just as well. Learning to ride a recumbent now, aged 31 and three-quarters, was essentially a repeat of that distant experience, but much quicker. Instead of Daddy running along behind with my best interests at heart, it was the man from the shop who owned the fantastically expensive machine that I might just crash. Shaking him off, whatever his motivation, was an excellent incentive to get it together.

It's all about taking a chance: balancing on two wheels never seems a good bet in the cold light of day. Sitting back with your legs out in front of you makes getting the pedals going much more committed than when they're just a few inches from the ground and you're only a step away from standing on your own two feet. As you prepare to push off for the first time, being too analytical and thinking about how you'll balance makes life hard. Letting things come naturally, aided and abetted by minimal cerebral input, is the way to do it, so the experts say: I had no problem at all.

Once you're on your way, within minutes it feels so natural that you can begin to appreciate what's going on. Contrary to expectation, the handling is precise – the bike goes where you point it – and it feels amazingly responsive to your pedalling input; these are definitely machines for speed. With the excellent weight distribution (low and towards the back) braking is encouragingly smooth and powerful, and while banking over to corner fast, you can still pedal with ample clearance.

Just to confuse things, and to gratify small boys in men's bodies, recumbents can be successfully ridden in all kinds of traffic conditions but they excel on the open road, going farther, faster and with less effort. The mechanics of having a seat behind you to resist your push against the pedals is superb, allowing your upper body to relax and your lungs to breathe efficiently while your legs do the work. The aerodynamic advantage is also significant, particularly with the addition of



Fast track you may look bizarre on a recumbent bike but you'll find the sensation of speed uplifting
Photograph: Eric Kendall

Where to learn/ try/ buy
Some bike shops stock recumbents, but for the UK's biggest range and expert tuition, try Future Cycles (01342 822847) in Sussex. For the full experience they offer day and weekend hire, with money back if you like it so much that you decide to buy a recumbent. Weekend breaks including B&B, tuition and two days' hire cost £115.

Other outlets where tuition is available are: Gear of Glasgow (0141 3391179) and the Avon Valley Cyclery (01225 442151).

Prices for recumbent cycles start at £399, though the average is around £1,000; recumbent trikes cost from £1,600 to £3,000.

Go faster
The British Human Power Club (BHP), 15 Station Road, Dyce, Aberdeen AB21 7BA, is the racing organisation for recumbent cyclists. Races are held at closed tracks and often involve recumbents with full body shells. The streamlined creed is based on the fact that on a conventional bike at 15mph, 80 per cent of the forces slowing the vehicle come from air resistance, and as the speed increases, so this percentage rises. No wonder cyclists always think they're riding into a headwind.

Speed records, such as 68.7mph for the solo flying 200-metre record, and 48.5 miles for the world hour record, make you wonder why conventional bike racers bother to get on the road at all.

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Falling with the snow

It's never too late to learn to ski - everyone is entitled to their share of exhilaration and humiliation. John Hobson keels over with the beginners' class... and the grappa.

Sixty years old and a ski novice, so what you need right at the outset is a reminder of mortality. Day one of the holiday and the lifts are closed for the funeral of a 58-year-old skier - and he was an instructor.

True, he was an avalanche victim - and these just don't happen on nursery slopes. Come to that, he wasn't just any old maestro either, but a ski-run architect, a visionary who helped this Italian village to develop other ways of appealing to tourists than making clogs. But there's nothing like a leaden sky, and the quiet contemplation of the black saloon's roof-rack piled high with mourning flowers instead of skis, to reinforce geriatric self-doubt.

It's a somewhat Gothic reprise of the gnawing anxieties that greet each day. If the dawn brings any certainty, it is that the inexpert skier of late middle-age won't be troubled by constipation.

Less than two hours by *autostrada* and hairpin bends from Turin, this is Champoluc, the Monte Rosa towering above like the opening credit from Paramount Pictures. Until you round the corner to the lift concourse, the only street worth the name is unburned and congenial.

At weekends, though, the village centre becomes jammed with cars and mini-vans, a promenade of designer labels. This influx of locals means some waiting at the lifts, which for the rest of the week possess something of the quiet, and purpose, of

the confessional. Side by side and soaring aloft, plump strangers of a certain age scan each other's faces for a wrinkle count, and confide their fears about recovery time from ligament operations.

These are the aerodynamically challenged men and women of the lower slopes with bulky salopettes and thick-lined coats zipped to the chin. They hit skis and boots because investing in their own would be just another temptation to fate.

But it's just possible you're not past it, and that you'll come out miraculously rejuvenated at the other end. That's the gamble. This is the hubris segment of the grey pound holiday market.

During the good times, say mid-morning after a satisfactory warm-up and a few successful turns, you're entitled to a stake in the universal exhilaration. The fresh air, the frequently flawless blue skies, the mountains coated in snow like thick cream, the crisp powder under the ski: the brochure speaks true. The bonus is the sense of being there on borrowed time.

The beginners' class is not solely a company of men and women, but to the sound of infant voices, and Italian infants at that. They accept as just an oddity of the adult world that a fully-grown Brit, on the edge of decline, should trail along at the back as they snowplough down the nursery slope. Later in the day, it raises a few eyebrows among passers-by



Taking a turn: but even at 60, the enthusiastic beginner need not be over the hill

Photograph: Skishoot

when your chubby-cheeked acquaintances hail you familiarly across the street, but at least you're developing a ski reputation of sorts.

Even a 60-year-old can reasonably hope to graduate to catch-all intermediate status after a full week of lessons. From then on, allocation by ability to the ideal ski class becomes less precise, conscientiously though the organisers try to mix and match. But you might just be fortunate enough to spend the week under the tutelage of a comparatively grizzled old instructor who will intuitively understand your needs, and cajole you up the mountain with the promise of a glass or two of grappa at the next resting place.

Meanwhile, it's not difficult to ignore the happy-camper invitations to fondue nights and torchlit ski runs from company reps on 18-30 Club day release. Après your ski, bliss is a hot shower or a good soak. Instead of stepping out into the sub-zero darkness, the evening is a decent meal and a drink in the hotel, an Italian TV game show, and so to bed.

You can afford to skip the discussion in the bar about piste quality. If the slope is patchy with ice, you'll fall over. That's about it.

But you will have to scour the brochures carefully for clues to the information that's nearest to your heart. Never mind the piste, how far are you going to have to trudge with your skis wearing a hole in your shoulder? Is it uphill from the hotel to the lift? Has the travel company arranged for you to dump your hired gear near the lift bottom overnight? If so, is the cost already included? Sure, there are plenty of lifts, but wouldn't you rather be sitting in a chair than hanging on to a drag lift, trying to keep your skis in line with the nuts in the snow?

Get the details wrong, and failure will etch itself on your anatomy. The body heals, but the mental scars remain from a penitential week in Popolo, the alti-ski, a split-level Italian resort, where the alternative to stepping out of the hotel on to a daunting drag lift was a ski-burdened, 15-minute tramp up an unforgiving gradient.

Adjust, also, to the fact that skiing is a clan activity, for enthusiasts supposedly inured to discomfort. Airport check-in queues double in length because of all the ski clutter and because some airports struggle to cope with the numbers.

It's the shared experience and skier argot that draws participants into a group culture. The wide open spaces of the airport lounge respond to cries of recognition from holidays past, and there's much exchanging of hugs and kisses in the aisles as the coaches sweep new arrivals to the resorts.

Don't knock it. Embrace it, tentatively, having first identified your bolt-hole for when you've had enough. Consider this: where, outside a group of similarly mature years, are you going to find solicitous concern, the emergency loan of an elastic bandage or a bottle of liniment?

With luck, anyway, at some stage of the day you'll have found your own breathing space, taking in the mountain view, proud and alone. Think of the grappa. You're that much closer to heaven.

Turin is tricky to reach direct from the UK. Alitalia (011-602 7111) flies daily from London City airport to Turin in association with its codeshare partner Azurra Air. The alternative is to fly to Geneva, Nice or Milan and travel onwards by rail or car.

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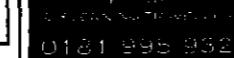
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Fully Booked

For pirates, painters, and anyone else who loves a Cornish fishing village, Polperro is the place, says Linda Cookson

For all you landlubbers, there are two ways into the famously beautiful Cornish fishing village of Polperro. You can approach by road or by cliff path.

If you choose the road, you'll need to leave your car at the public car park at the entrance to the village and walk the half mile or so down towards the harbour. Or – if you're that way inclined – take a ride with the Polperro Horse Bus Company and make your arrival by horse and cart. The disadvantage of this option is that it will be hard to kid yourself that you're not a tourist. Thousands of visitors descend daily on the village at the height of the season. In minutes you'll have joined the throng and be jostling through the gamut of party stalls, ice-cream barrows, postcard shops and the like. As tourist spots go, Polperro is by no means unbearably twee. But it's a pity to hit the lucky pixie charm shop and the fish and chip outlet ("Chip Ahoy!") before you've had even a sniff of sea air.

Far more enticing is the approach on foot, along the glorious National Trust coastal path linking the village with the fishing towns of Looe in one direction and Fowey in the other. It's hard to imagine a more magical first view of a village anywhere in the world. As you round the headland, a tiny, picturesque harbour unfolds before you. The accompanying vista of centuries-old fishermen's cottages nestling in narrow crooked streets and clinging to steep hillsides is a scenic artist's fantasy.

Whichever way you arrive, a major joy is to explore the winding streets and passageways, and to marvel at the character and charm of the buildings. Straight lines are hard to find – amid a jumble of assorted shapes and styles, architectural pragmatism rules supreme. Individuality flourishes. *Jaunty windowboxes and hanging baskets create a riot of colour against the paintbox white of most of the cottages. One house has been covered entirely in shells brought home by its owner, a sea captain.*

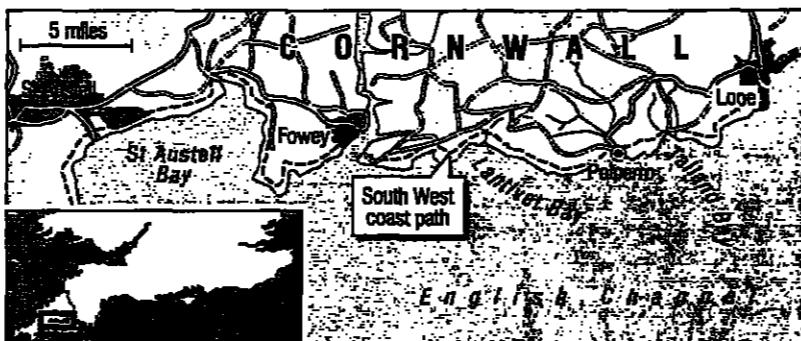
Polperro remains a working fishing village, though the standard catch is now mackerel rather than the pilchards that used to abound. But it is still steeped in the history of its heyday as a smugglers' den. Nestled in its sheltered ravine setting, the village became an ideal location for smuggling in the 18th century - with consignments of contraband brandy, gin and tobacco coming from Guernsey. This history is celebrated in Polperro's memorabilia-packed

A high-contrast, black and white photograph capturing a coastal town built into a steep hillside. The town features a cluster of buildings with white facades and dark roofs, some with visible chimneys, perched on the upper slopes. In the foreground, a harbor is filled with numerous small boats, their masts and hulls silhouetted against the bright sky. The water is dark and reflects the surrounding structures. The overall image has a stark, graphic quality due to the high contrast between the deep shadows and the bright highlights.

Singing in the smugglers' den

Heritage Museum of Smuggling and Fishing, situated in an old pilchard factory overlooking the harbour.

During this century, Polperro has become more of a magnet for artists. The East Cornwall Society of Artists mounts an annual exhibition at the Ebenezer Gallery near the entrance to the village. And down by the quayside, the Peak Rock Artists Studio & Gallery is a working studio open to the public. From 20-28 June, the third annual Festival of Arts, Music and Drama will take place in the village. Performers will include the famous Polperro Fishermen's



Choir, plus visiting artists such as the guitarist Bert Jansch and the poet Brian Patten, whose Cornish poem for *The Independent* appears opposite.

Independent appears opposite.

Should you weary of the bustle within the village itself, do remember the loveliness of the coastline. The sandy beach a nearby Talland Bay is only a mile along the Coastal Path, with Looe some three-and-a-half miles farther on. If you don't quite feel up to that exertion, you can always head inland, following the stream from Talland Bay to Bridals Lane, once a spot notorious

For details of the 1998 Polperro Festival of

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For a staunch Methodist community (John Wesley preached there twice in the 1760s) Polperro is reassuringly well stocked with pubs. My own favourites are the Blue Peter, on the end of the quay, and the Three Pilchards, beside the harbour. The Noughts & Crosses, formerly a bakery, is also worth a visit. Its name comes from the book-keeping habits of its 17th-century owner. Eating out in the evenings is excellent.

All pubs offer food - the Crumplehorn Inn, at the entrance to the village, is the best in my opinion - and there's a surprisingly wide variety of restaurants. For a change, try The Mermaid Pizza.

To see Polperro at its loveliest, stay overnight. For longer stays, hiring a cottage is easily the best bet. The main specialist provider is Polperro's Black Horse Agency which handles some 26 holiday properties (01503 277303).

(01503 272303). For shorter stays, the Crumplehorn Inn – which also offers self-catering apartments – does bed and breakfast for two people sharing a double room at £40 a night (01503 272348). Bed and breakfast in the Old Mill House Hotel in the centre of the village (01503 272362) costs £45 for a double room (extra charge for the four-poster).

But if money is no object, venture that mile or so along the cliff path to the Tallyland Bay Hotel (01503 272667). This attractive country house, dating back to the 16th century, is set amid gorgeous gardens and overlooks the sea. Dinner, plus bed and breakfast for two sharing a double room with sea view, could set you back as much as £190 at the height of the season. But prices are less steep at this time of year: dinner, bed – in a room with a sea view – and breakfast cost £72 per person, and there's a special offer of £110 per person for two nights including dinner and breakfast, but minus the view.

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<div

The heat is on

A taste of... Jamaican jerk seasoning. By Nikki Spence

In Jamaica "jerk" means just one thing – hot, spicy barbecued meat that is now so popular that it has become the unofficial national dish and is being sampled all over the world. Here in Britain, jerk cafés and restaurants are starting to appear and jerk seasoning is also available in supermarkets.

"Jerk" – where meat (originally pork but now most commonly chicken) is rubbed with a paste of Scotch bonnet peppers, nutmeg, pimento, cinnamon, spring onions and salt and pepper, and then cooked over charcoal and green pimento wood – can be traced back to the middle of the 18th century, and the guerrilla war between ex-slaves (known as Maroons) and the English. Wild boar was a source of food for the rebels, and the jerk seasoning was a means of preservation. The meat was slathered with the aromatic spice combination and wrapped in leaves before being cooked in pits filled with hot stones, or grilled slowly over a fire.

This secret way of preparing pork was mainly concentrated in the Boston Beach area in the parish of Portland, the home of the original jerk pits. Then, about 15 years ago, it started to gain popularity. Jerk hubs sprung up on roadsides all over Jamaica, and soon local companies such as Walker's Wood were buying pig carcasses, jerking the meat and selling it to local bars and cafés.

According to the founding director, Roddy Edwards, no one had thought of bottling the jerk seasoning itself until the company started to get enquiries from tourists asking where they could buy it.

"The fact that people were bothering to write to us all the way from America and elsewhere made us realise that we were definitely on to something," says



Roddy, whose company now supplies Tesco, Sainsbury and Waitrose.

"Jerk seasoning does seem to have captured the imagination, not just in Jamaica but increasingly all over the world."

"I think that what's so special about it is that it isn't just about heat, but is a blend of flavours that people really seem to enjoy."

A taste of jerk

● When Jamaica plays Wales at Ninian Park in Cardiff on Wednesday, the usual stadium fare of hot dogs and burgers has been ditched. Instead, the crowd will be able to sample jerk chicken and patties.

● Jerk isn't just for meat-eaters, according to the consortium Jamaica 98, which is currently promoting Jamaican food and drink in staff canteens in conjunction with Gardner Merchant. Apparently, jerk tofu and stir-fry veg have been going down well with all the companies that have tried it – including the BBC and London Underground.

● Enco Products, maker of Dunn's River Jamaican Jerk Seasoning, has produced a free Caribbean recipe booklet. Available with a large SAE from Dunn's River Cookbook Offer (10s), Enco Products, Welham Green, Hertfordshire AL9 7HF.

For more tastes of Jamaica, try...

● Ackee. This fruit with yellow flesh tastes remarkably like scrambled eggs when cooked. Served with salt fish, this is the official national dish.

● Callaloo. A leafy, spinach-like vegetable often used as a base for thick soup flavoured with pork or crabmeat.

● Escovitch fish – fish fried or grilled, and then pickled in a tangy sauce.

● Festival – deep-fried, slightly sweet dumpling

Solid, write-on antiques

The stuff of... status. A good desk is not only impressive, it can be a sound investment, writes

Sally Staples

Whether you are the chairman of a multinational corporation or starting up in business on your own, the most prestigious object in your office will be the desk.

It may be an imposing item of antique magnificence, or a more modest piece of furniture that will blend comfortably into a home that is also an office. Whatever your needs, Jan Elias at the Dorking Desk Shop in Surrey, one of the largest suppliers of antique

desks in the country, offers plenty to choose from. There are partners' desks where two people can sit opposite one another, narrow bureaux with sloping tops and drawers beneath, bureau bookcases and even old school desks jostling for space in the shop showroom.

Most of the stock is classic Victorian, and full restoration work can be undertaken on the premises. Many of the desks are bought at auction and given a face-lift before being sold. Most prices range from £1,000 to £5,000, depending on the size, condition and age of the desk.

"Desks are a status symbol and they need to give out the right signals. In a doctor's surgery or a solicitor's office the desk itself and how it is positioned can affect the atmosphere," says Mr Elias.

The old mahogany and oak desks have solid wooden drawers – no plywood or chipboard bases – and are hand-crafted. These pieces of furniture were built to last, and often the only restoration needed is a new leather top.

"No two antique desks are quite the same," Mr Elias continues. "And as an increasing number of people are now working from home they often want a distinctive desk with character that is also a nice piece of furniture. Also, it's a good investment. People spend £15,000 on a car that will be written down for a small percentage of that value in five years. But spend £5,000 on an antique desk, and you will find its value will steadily increase."

The Dorking Desk Shop has sold Sir Winston Churchill's desk, and many other well-known antiques have passed through its doors.

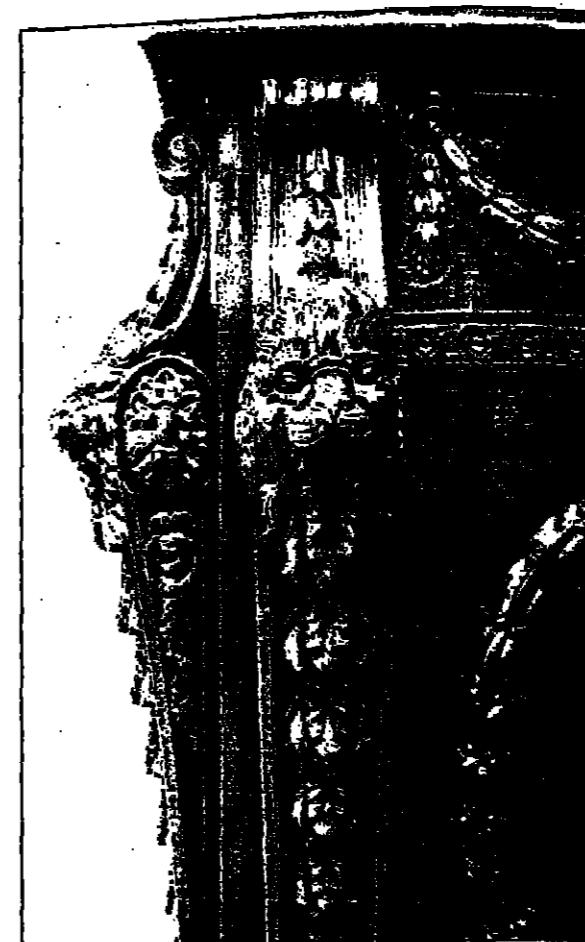
Currently its most valuable piece is a copy of Chippendale's Nestell Priory desk. The Neoclassical-style copy, crafted in 1865, has superbly detailed, carved swags and flowers,

and a smooth, black hide leather top.

The price tag is a cool £65,000.

Among the desks, you can glimpse a variety of antique furniture including a Victorian mahogany chaise longue (£1,450), a Victorian rocking-chair (£480), a grandfather long-case mahogany clock with special naval features (£4,850) and even a pair of brass candlesticks (£160).

The Dorking Desk Shop, 41 West Street, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 1BU (01306-83327), Open Monday to Friday 8am-5.30pm; Saturday 10.30am-1pm; 2-5pm. A second showroom is now open at Stoney Craft Farm, Reigate Road, Betchworth, Surrey RH3 7EY (01737-845215).



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PSYCHOLOGICAL GAME OF THE WEEK

WILLIAM HARTSTON

On last week's *Desert Island Discs* on Radio Four, the mathematician Ian Stewart mentioned a probabilistic paradox that fools most people who are presented with it. It goes like this:

Imagine you are a contestant in a game show. You have answered all the questions correctly, and can now open one of three doors to determine your prize. Behind one door is this week's star prize, a magnificent new car; behind each of the other doors is a goat.

You select one of the doors, and the game show host – who knows which door has the star prize behind it – then opens one of doors you did not select and shows you a goat behind it. He then offers you the chance to change your mind. Do you take it?

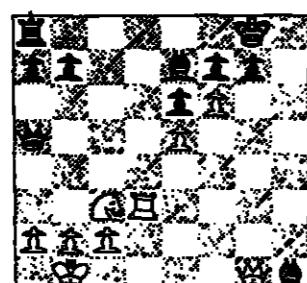
Most people, said Stewart, stick to their original choice, reasoning that they now know the car is behind one of the still closed doors, so the chance they have picked the right one is 50-50.

CHESS: WILLIAM HARTSTON

Probably the biggest difference between the chess of today and the game of three or four decades ago is the speed at which information travels and theory changes. Even 20 years ago, players would rely on newspapers to get the details of games played a few days earlier in international events. Now they get impatient if they cannot find all the moves on the Internet within five minutes of the game's finish.

One result is that opening innovations have a far shorter shelf life. In the old days, a player could hoard a new idea for months, or even years, and might even catch two or three opponents with it before news got around. Now, the pace of tournament play means any original idea has to be played instantly, before someone else gets the same idea.

This climate of throwaway originality was well illustrated by one game in Monaco this week. Viswanathan Anand has been having a good deal of success with a line of the Sicilian in which Black invites an attack on his king. In several recent games, Anand has shown some surprising resources for Black. In one line, however, Alexei Shirov spotted a killing improvement for White. He would, no doubt, have loved to save it for unleashing in an important tournament game, but with every sharp variation now being analysed by powerful



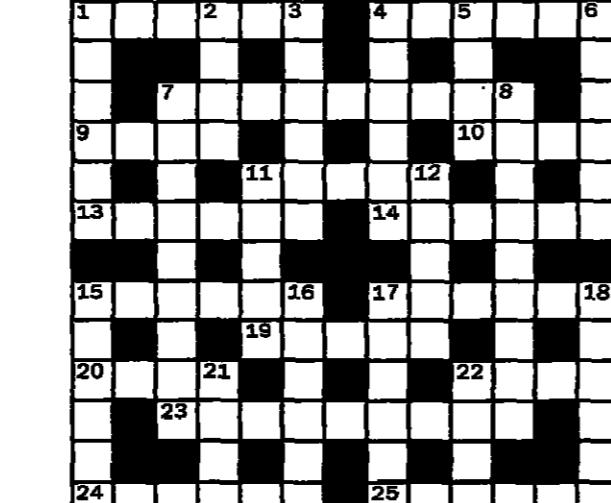
computers, he could be certain that if he did not play it at the first opportunity, either someone else would get there before him or Anand would discover it himself.

That is one reason why Shirov played 16.Qe3! in place of the older 16.Qf4 against Anand in the Amber Rapidplay event in Monte Carlo. The other reason is that Shirov is such an imaginative player; he knows that he can afford to squander one good idea, for another one will surely come along close behind. In the final position (see diagram) 20...Qh5 21.Qxh5 leaves Black helpless against the threat of Rh3.

White: Alexei Shirov
Black: Viswanathan Anand
1 e4 c5 11 Kbd1 Rd8
2 Nf3 d6 12 b4 Bd7
3 d4 cxd4 13 Bd3 b6
4 Nxd4 Nf6 14 a5 dxe5
5 Nc3 Nc6 15 fxe5 Bc6
6 Bg5 e6 16 Qe3 Rxd3
7 Qd2 Be7 17 Rxd3 hxg5
8 0-0-0 Nxd4 18 hxg5 Bxg2
9 Qxd4 0-0 19 gxf6 Bxf1
10 f4 Qa5 20 Qg1 resigns

CONCISE CROSSWORD

No.3564 Saturday 21 March



ACROSS

- 1 Murmur (6)
- 4 Influence (6)
- 7 Make intoxicated (9)
- 9 European city (4)
- 10 Imprint vividly (4)
- 11 Shape (5)
- 13 Scandinavian country (6)
- 14 Window in roof (6)
- 15 Protect (6)
- 17 Bank worker (6)
- 19 Sweetening agent (5)
- 20 Tandy (4)
- 22 Old (4)
- 23 Astonish (9)
- 24 Menace (6)
- 25 Piercing (6)

DOWN

- 1 NZ people (6)
- 2 NE river (4)
- 3 Strip of material (6)
- 4 Away from home (6)
- 5 Destiny (4)
- 6 Restricting rope (6)
- 7 Direct (9)
- 8 Study of derivations (9)
- 11 Breakfast, dinner etc (5)
- 12 Channel port (5)
- 15 Choose (6)
- 16 Sweet-sounding (6)
- 17 Zodiac sign (6)
- 18 Type of tire (6)
- 21 Other (4)
- 22 At a great distance (4)

Solution to yesterday's Concise Crossword:
ACROSS: 1 Drive, 3 Versions (Dimensions), 9 Creed, 10 Impasse, 11 Tap, 13 Locks, 14 Spirit, 16 Rosary, 18 Inclement, 20 Era, 22 Deplore, 23 Cargo, 25 Gold dust, 26 Omit, 28 Dumb, 1 Ductus, 2 Vie, 4 Editor, 5 Soprano, 6 Obscene, 7 Scenery, 8 Idol, 12 Principal, 14 Shindig, 15 Icy-cold, 17 Recession, 19 Tick, 21 About, 24 Rump.

BRIDGE: ALAN HIRON

Game all; dealer West

North

♦9 6 4 3

▼J 6

♦K Q 9 7 6

♦Q 9

West

♦A K Q 7

▼A 9 3 2

♦8 4

♦8 6 2

East

♦10 5 2

▼Q 10 7 5

♦10 5 3

♦10 7 4

South

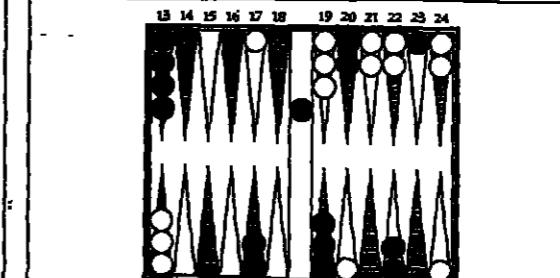
♦J 8

▼K 8 4

♦A J 2

♦A K J 5 3

BACKGAMMON: CHRIS BRAY



Should I take or should I drop? Quite often emotion gets in the way of good judgement on this dilemma, but if we can eliminate the emotion, how should you decide whether to take or drop? First you must evaluate the position and decide on a game plan. Having decided that, you try to estimate your game-winning chances. If you expect to win one game in four, then you probably have a take. Even if you expect to win only one game in five, you may have a take if the game has a long way to go, as owning the cube has considerable value.

The other critical factor is the gammon threat (if it exists). If you expect to lose a gammon, say, 10 per cent of the time, this can change your decision. The rule of thumb is to halve the gammon percentage and add it to the basic 25 per cent take point. So if you expect to lose a gammon 10 per cent of the time, your take point becomes 30 per cent. Estimating the gammon potential of positions comes only with experience; as a simple guide 20 per cent of all games played to completion (that is, not ended by a double) are gammons. Thus in most early or middle games your take point is normally nearer to 30 per cent than to 25 per cent.

Look at the position above. Black has just been hit and stayed on the bar. White now doubles; should Black accept? Black's plan is to anchor on White's 2-point if he can, but he may not get the chance, as White will attack the blot on the 2-point next roll. My estimate is that Black will lose at least 30 per cent. Can Black win two games out of every five? The answer is no – his structure is not good enough to contain White if he gets a shot, and his racing chances are minimal. Therefore Black should drop the double.



Blown up in style

Catherine Hough makes glass bottles – but don't worry about filling them; they are a triumph of art over function. Claire Gervat considers the ultimate Mother's Day present

There is a good chance that many of this weekend's most harried shoppers will be those searching for the perfect Mother's Day present, and high on their list will be that perennial favourite, perfume.

But for the more imaginative giver, and lucky recipient, there is an exclusive alternative. For, no matter how much time the designers at Dior, Chanel *et al* dedicate to creating the perfect container for their product, there is nothing to beat the luxury of a custom-made perfume bottle.

Whether any of Catherine Hough's customers at her south London studio would really commission one of her sensuous handmade glass bottles for keeping scent

is a moot point, however. After all, they cost more than their contents are likely to – around £200 or so for an individual design – though she has a standard range that retails for about £75 in such places as the Crafts Council shop in north London.

Catherine herself believes that "when somebody commissions a bottle, they're usually looking beyond the function of it, towards having something that is a true one-off, a special piece. I suspect they're not used very often, though I take great pains to make sure the stopper fits perfectly. More often than not they are ornaments. There are, after all, lots of people who collect bottles."

Commissioning an individual

piece is not a speedy process. "A special design takes quite a bit of time. There are the meetings with the client to work out what they want, then you have to do a prototype. That's what raises the cost."

Although some customers have

strong ideas as to what they want, anyone who is less than certain need not feel daunted. To provide inspiration, there are plenty of examples of Catherine's bottles, with their sinuous stoppers, textured surfaces and jewel-bright bubbles of colour, on display in the office at her shared studio.

Catherine's love of glass dates

from an early age. But at the time

she left school, in 1967, it was diffi-

cult for creative glassblowers to find somewhere to train and work, so she went into teaching.

"It's only really in the past 20 or 25 years that studios with small furnaces have existed," she points out. The first one was The Glasshouse in Covent Garden, and having attended one of their evening classes she decided to go back to college to do a specialist glass course. Three years later she left Stourbridge College of Art with a degree and a job at the crystal specialists Royal Brierley, making ornate, one-off pieces.

Her reputation for making exquisite perfume bottles started to develop after she left Royal Brierley. She was offered a place at The

Glasshouse's workshop, where she was able to rethink and simplify her style.

"That's when I started using natural objects as sources for my designs: pebbles, rock strata, ripples in the sand. The perfume bottles were just something I enjoyed making. It was an interesting challenge to relate the bottle and stopper into one shape. And having started making them, I've made more. It was something I became known for."

Since then, Catherine's work has featured widely in shows, and there are examples in permanent collections in Sweden, the US and Germany, as well as in Britain.

One of the identifying marks of

her style is the large amount of work that is done *after* the basic shape has been created. But first a tiny amount of coloured glass is wrapped in clear glass over the end of a rod, to be blown out as the colour lines the inside of the bubble.

"I don't blow it out very thin, so

you can always see the shape of the bubble suspended in the clear glass," Catherine remarks. After that, the bottle is polished, textured and decorated.

What this means is that Catherine needs only one or two days a week at the furnace. Yet furnaces have to be kept running constantly, gobbling up fuel and money, so it's often not viable for glass makers to

work on their own. Catherine has always shared studios with other craftspeople. Since early last year, she has had a large space in a workshop in Clapham, south London, owned by Simon Moore. It suits her perfectly, she says.

And should you find that one of her perfume bottles would suit you perfectly, too, clear a space on the dressing-table and leave this page in a prominent position. Your family may well be grateful for the inspiration.

Catherine Hough Glass is at Unit Two, Union Court, Union Road, London SW4 6JH (0171-498 6453; fax 0171-720 1046; e-mail hough-glass@aol.com).

Cut out and keep

Making it:
parchment design is an addictive occupation, and the skills are surprisingly easy to learn.
Sally Staples gets scissor-happy with the joys of creating a good old-fashioned greetings card

On Tuesday mornings Marian Ferrett's dining room turns into a cosy studio for six women who have all become devotees of parchment craft. Few people will recognise the name, but most would know the product. Parchment craft is the art of producing those embossed and decorated cards that were popular in the Victorian era. They look intricate and complex to make. But, as Marian's students testify, anyone can do it.

The art of making these cards dates back to the 15th century, when it was taught by nuns in Colombia. As an eminently suitable pastime for young ladies, parchment craft thrived in Victorian times and is now slowly enjoying a resurgence as craft shops are offering lessons.

The students begin by tracing a design on to a waxy, shiny sheet of paper that feels a little like plastic and gives the effect

of parchment. The attraction here is that though not everyone can draw, we all learned to trace things at school. Nor is there any need to be creative in design, as there are numerous pattern books offering a huge variety of themes – Christmas and Easter motifs, fruit, flowers, animals, birds, abstract styles.

Once the tracing is complete there is the opportunity to colour the parchment-like paper to any hue. Using oil pastel crayons, Marian simply scribbles a few lines of colour on the back of the parchment and then wipes surgical spirit over the colour to stain the paper.

At this stage there is the option to use colour on the design itself. So if you want the flowers to be yellow, the birds blue and the butterflies red you simply paint inside the traced lines – as easy as painting by numbers.

"I always encourage people to start painting with a felt tip

because they feel safer with something that is familiar," says Marian. "With many people, if you put a brush into their hands they freeze."

But if you don't freeze with a brush the painting can be done with acrylic paints or even water-soluble pencils. Not everyone chooses to use colour; some prefer what is called a white-work effect.

The next stage is embossing. Marian provides each student with a pad to rest on and a set of embossing pens of different thicknesses, and they simply fill in the design with the embossing tool to raise it slightly from the parchment. Different sizes of tool will give varying effects.

The parchment design can either be mounted on a card, or made so that it encloses an inset where messages can be written. At the end of a couple of hours even the most hesitant beginner will have produced a greetings card that looks utterly professional. It is not arduous, nor do you need artistic flair.

The women, who regularly have a five-hour session with Marian, take great pride in their handwork and have an impressive portfolio of cards, Christmas tags, bookmarks, table seating cards, photograph mounts and even some three-dimensional work.

Margaret Gidley, a retired civil servant from Bordon in Hampshire, says: "You can have such fun with this if you like painting, or the intricate lace-work – done with a four-needle tool followed by some deft hand movements with a pair of scissors – or you just want to experiment with the embossing to get different textures and effects. There is something for everyone. And it is amazing how good children are at this craft. My grandsons, aged seven and 10, will sit with me at the kitchen table for hours working on cards. It makes a good contrast to dashing about on a skateboard."

"It's the first craft I've ever done where you can take home something good enough to give someone after just one lesson. And if you want to progress, the advanced techniques show how to make 3-D designs and parchment flowers."

Irene Mason, from Farnham in Hampshire, has been working on the craft for a year

and has sent her cards all over the world. So keen is she to spread the word that on a recent visit to the Dolly Parton theme park in Tennessee she spoke to sponsors about setting up a parchment craft stall in the park. "Very few people seem to know about it in America, although it is a popular craft in Australia," she says.

Pam Cisman, from Farnborough, says that parchment craft was a joy to find after failing at painting. "I tried watercolours and wasn't any good. I think you can either draw or you can't. But I like doing things with my hands, and this is marvellous. I can copy exactly from the pattern books. Other people can draw in their own designs, but I don't have to worry about that."

To set yourself up to learn parchment craft at home costs only £20, as there are few tools needed. Marian's sessions, where all materials are provided, cost around £10. She teaches children at a local school in Liphook and adults in Hampshire craft shops. For details, call 01428-713049.

Her colleague, Wendy Stone, teaches at craft shops in Surrey (01372-453452). Together they are holding a demonstration day to raise funds for motor neurone disease on 17 October at The Old Barn Hall, Church Road, Bookham, Surrey. Entry costs £2. Details from Marian or Wendy.

These holidays have been arranged in conjunction with Festive Holidays Ltd, ABTA V100X, ATOL 2172 Reg Office 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL

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Good on paper: Victorian parchment in the making

Photograph: Tom Pistor

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Lola's last orders

Rural pub meets
big corporation: Duff
Hart-Davis on a brewing
row between landlord
and leisure group

It's not often that you arrive at a pub to find that the landlord has just been banned from his own premises. But that was what happened on Tuesday when I dropped in for a hunchback pint at the Fleece, in the Worcestershire village of Breiferton.

If a national competition were held to find the quintessential English pub, the Fleece would be a strong contender. Of medieval origin, half-timbered, leaning all ways, the building was once a farmhouse, owned for centuries by the Byrd family; and since Henry Byrd obtained a licence to sell beer and cider in 1848 it has remained miraculously unchanged, inside and out.

Regulars still speak reverently of Lola Taplin, Henry's great-granddaughter, who ran the pub single-handed for 30 years until she died, aged 83, in 1977. The place is still full of the artefacts she inherited: an assembled - wooden cheese moulds black with age; a cheese press weighted with a massive block of stone;

a magnificent collection of pewter salvers dating back to Cromwell. White circles painted on the floor in front of the fireplace are kept clean to deny witches access via the chimney, and the ghostly form of Lola herself sometimes still appears in the rocking-chair in the Pewter Room.

This latest turn of events must have set her spinning in her grave. In her will she left the Fleece to the National Trust, with instructions that it should be maintained as a traditional village pub. The Trust first leased it to the Campaign for Real Ale (Camra), and this at first seemed a good idea; but in fact it failed, because widespread advertising attracted real-ale freaks from far and wide, and the place became too popular for its size.

The next lessee was an offshoot of Camra, Midsummer Leisure, which in 1990 was taken over by European Leisure, a company that runs mainly upmarket private members' snooker and billiard clubs. As landlord they inherited John Griffiths (known to all as "Griff"), a local man who is a former butcher.

For nearly nine years everything went well. Griff and his wife Linda did all they could to preserve the pub's traditions: they declined to install piped music, fruit machines or television, and they continued to keep beers from numerous independent breweries. Thus, at the moment, you can get Old Spot ale from the Gloucestershire village of Uley,

Fox's Nob bitter from the Highgate Brewing Company in Walsall, CHB bitter from the Warde's Brewery in Northamptonshire, and Whistling Joe from the Brandy Cask brewery at Pershore, besides Brew XI from Bass, the holding company's main supplier.

For nine years, in other words, Griff did his best to honour Lola's wishes. But now, suddenly, the job has blown up under him.

The trouble started last year, when European Leisure began putting pressure on him to secure larger discounts from independent brewers, or throw their beers out. (Bass, with their enormous output, can undercut smaller operators by a large margin.) Then, on 18 February this year, he received a directive headed "Drinks Stocking Policy", which ordered all "units" to give "maximum support to Bass and their products".

The list of approved products included no real ales from independent breweries. "Certain other products" might be stocked, but these were "very limited", the directive laid down. The rules "must be enforced vigorously".

If managers failed to implement the new policy, the company "would have no alternative but to resort to disciplinary action". This was too much for Griff, who handed in his notice. He was to have left yesterday, but on Tuesday a team from European Leisure descended unannounced to scrutinise

his stock and accounts, and he himself was told that he would not be welcome behind the bar after 3pm. When I arrived at midday, the place was seething. Men and women in dark suits stood outside, glued to mobile telephones. A new young manager had been hastily imported from a pub in Stafford. Griff and Linda were gathering personal possessions. Regulars were bobbing in and out, bemused and angry.

Tim Fender, European Leisure's regional manager, was looking acutely uncomfortable, and explained that the whole upheaval was the result of a mistake. A copy of the memorandum should never have been sent to the Fleece, he said. He had tried to get Griff to reverse his decision. "The company's not going to spoil the pub in any way," he told me. "There's no reason whatever to change it. Why change things if they're going well?"

Locals are asking that very question. The darts team, the football club and the quiz league have already voted with their feet, decamping with the landlord to the bar of the British Legion club along the road.

Damage may be limited by the fact that European Leisure's lessee will run out next year, but the row does highlight the difficulties that arise when traditional pubs - of which few enough remain - fall into the hands of firms governed by managers, accountants and "targets".

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE



Always keep a promise ... or your house may fall down, and you could be haunted by a fat butcher from Wapping. This is what happened to the Tichborne family when they failed to honour a promise made 600 years before.

On her deathbed the good Lady Mabella Tichborne asked her husband to agree to give a yearly hand-out of flour to local poor villagers every Lady Day. Nasty Sir Roger would promise only if his dying wife crawled round a field. This she did, and the field is still known as The Crawls. Before she died, Lady Mabella put a curse on any of her heirs who ignored the promise made to her.

When the Dole of Flour was temporarily stopped, late in the 18th century, the curse came into force. Family disasters culminated in the appearance of a false heir to the Tichborne fortunes. After a long trial, which used up much of the Tichborne family money, the claimant was discredited



and imprisoned. He was proved to be a Mr Orton, a plump butcher from East London. The promise made to Lady Mabella has been honoured ever since.

The Tichborne Dole of flour is given out to villagers from the steps of Tichborne House, Tichborne, Hampshire at 2.30pm on 25 March.

Sally Kindberg

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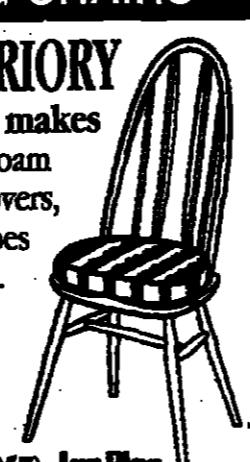
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Racing at home in Paradise

ON the Caribbean island of Barbados earlier this month, as preparations were underway for the Test between the West Indies and England, thoughts briefly turned away from the batsmen's track to the race-track for the annual running of the Sandy Lane Gold Cup at Garrison Savannah.

Such is the exodus of British racing's finest to Barbados for the winter, the island is nicknamed "Newmarket-on-Sea" and this year's cast list included the trainer Michael Stoute and the jockey Pat Eddery. Sponsored by the hotel Sandy Lane, which is partly-owned by the legendary Irish punter J P McManus, a crowd of 25,000 – 10 per cent of the island's population – cheered home this year's winner, Perdermico.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID ASHDOWN

Rancour runs on over ruined Business plan

Richard Edmondson
Racing Correspondent

COOL DAWN, the Cheltenham Gold Cup winner, was out enjoying himself in the West Country sunshine at the yard of his trainer, Robert Ainer, yesterday morning, but nearby the day was anything but calm.

At Manor Farm Stables, the home of See More Business, Paul Nicholls was still seething over the manner of his much-fancied horse's removal from Thursday's Blue Riband of steeplechasing.

Britain's great hope was carried out at the seventh fence after the stricken Cyborg, and his partner Tony McCoy, swerved across him. Racing folk are used to the slings and arrows of their capricious sport, but this relative H-bomb was too much for See More Business's connections to bear.

The stewards concluded that the incident was no more than an accident after hearing that McCoy shouted over his predicament to fellow jockeys. Timmy Murphy, See More Business's jockey, said he heard nothing.

Nicholls himself had to be restrained by his party from expressing his true feelings on Thursday, and yesterday he was restraining himself. "Everyone could see what happened and Paul doesn't want to add anything to that," a stable spokeswoman said. "He's very disappointed and angry."

The full reason for the wrath has yet to emerge, but the Business team are not happy. "All I wish to say is that racing people in general must look at the tape and come to their own conclusions," Paul Barber, the horse's joint-owner, added.

"I wish Robert and Sally Ainer, and Dido [Harding, Cool Dawn's owner], who are great Blackmore Vale hunting people, a wonderful Gold Cup. I've known them for years and it's super for them. It's their wonderful day. I don't want to be seen as a bad loser, but it does take a bit of taking."

Cyborg himself is not in a very good way. Martin Pipe was talking darkly about serious problems with the horse's back after the Gold Cup, and the eight-year-old's exact injury has yet to be specified. "He's still in the yard, but we're not ab-



Cooling down: After his exertions in winning the Gold Cup on Thursday, Cool Dawn is led yesterday along the hedged lanes near his Dorset stable by his trainer, Robert Ainer. Photograph: Julian Herbert/Allsport

solutely sure of the diagnosis at present," a Pond House spokesman said yesterday.

Meanwhile, Cool Dawn was probably feeling very proud of himself yesterday after Locketts Farm as immediate plans for his future were being drawn up. A victory bow looks likely to take place in either the Whitbread Gold Cup or the Irish Grand National, in which he finished third two years ago.

"He will probably have another run but we want to let the dust settle and talk to the owner," Ainer said. "He is in the Whitbread and looks incredibly well handicapped now. And he

has been to Ireland before so that could be an option, but there will be no quick decision."

Cheltenham was also notable for revealing why there is no such beverage as a Maguire Festival cocktail. The two simply do not mix. Adrian Maguire missed the previous three Festivals and may have wished this one had passed him by as well.

He left without any form of trophy unless you include the broken collar-bone he sustained in a quite terrifying crash on the final day.

Maguire's fall from Zabadi and consequent high-speed scuttling from Sublime Fellow

had several pondering if his very life might be taken away. The jockey's injuries are not, however, as bad as first feared, though he may himself not see his crumpled collar-bone, concussion and removal from Grand National consideration as any great consolation.

"Adrian is going to be okay," Robert Parsons, the jockey's agent, said yesterday. "He was a lot happier last night and had something to eat. He should be out of hospital some time this morning."

"He has definitely got 21 days out due to concussion and I would have said he will be out for three to four weeks depending on the collar-bone, so he could be back for the Whitbread."

By then we will still be talking about a Cheltenham Festival which once again surpassed its improbable theatrical billing.

Cool Dawn was proof that there is still a place for the unlikely and lowly, while One Man's Queen Mother Champion Chase was perhaps the most emotional moment of the week.

Greatest of all though was the fact that this Festival set up others. The triumphs of Istabraq, French Holly and Flori-

da Pearl probably had the hotel switchboards buzzing away in the Cotswolds yesterday morning as long-term bookings pinged in.

We have them to look forward to as we must anticipate improved traffic arrangements at the course. Getting out of Cheltenham after racing can be like getting out of Alcatraz. It must also be hoped that Edward Gillespie and his boys select their car park staff a little more cleverly in 1999. There were yeomen of the gate last week who would have been last at home holding the keys at Wormwood Scrubs.

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BETTING: 2-1 Vindhan, 5-2 Stowes, 10-1 Gold Cup, 12-1 Baffert, 5-1 The Rake, 10-1 Mr. Baffert, 20-1 others

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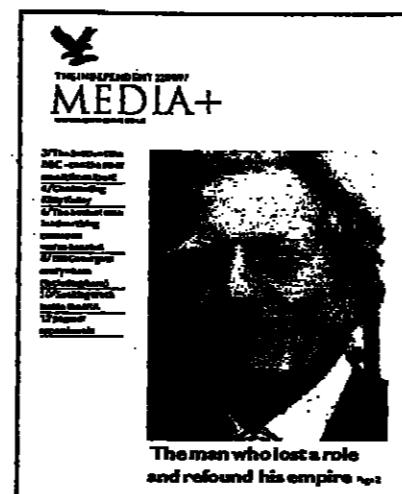
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IMPROVE YOURSELF

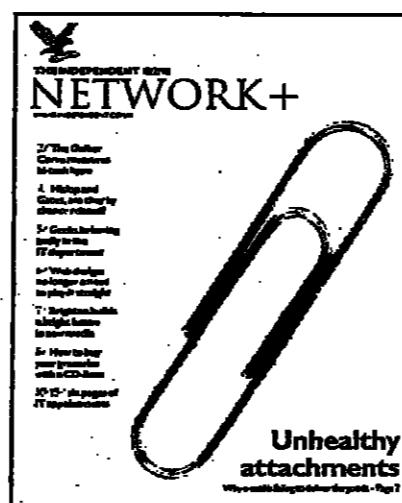
MONDAY



MEDIA+

Media, marketing, sales,
PR and fund raising vacancies

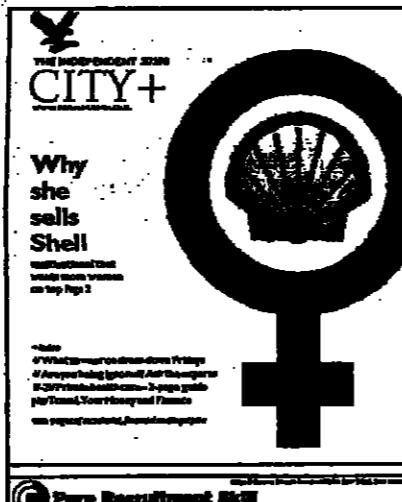
TUESDAY



NETWORK+

I.T., computing,
network, technical
and engineering vacancies

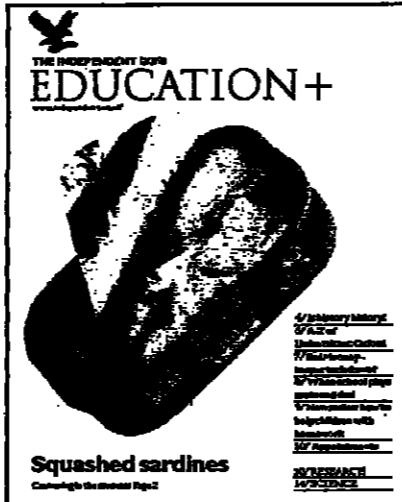
WEDNESDAY



CITY+

Secretarial, clerical, city,
finance, insurance,
accountancy and legal vacancies

THURSDAY



EDUCATION+/FASTTRACK

Universities, colleges and schools
courses. Graduate and general
appointments

Packed full of exciting career opportunities - Monday to Thursday

THE
INDEPENDENT

Free Cheltenham Three and tell bookies to take running jump



CHRIS MAUME

SPORT
ON TVSilk Cup
holds
pack of
pursuers

HORSES are intelligent, I've always believed that, despite their propensity for allowing fat aristocrats to jump on their backs and pursue unsuspecting fury things. The proof came on Thursday during the Gold Cup (C4), when the Cheltenham Three - Cyborg, See More Business and Indian Tracker - saw the somewhat daunting seventh fence coming up, had a quick word between them selves, thought "Sod that for a game of unseated riders" and took off for the Cotswolds.

They must have been reading about the Tamworth Two, and reasoned, "Well, pigs might fly and horses might as well." No doubt dedicating their freedom dash to Brixton and Sundance, they were off,

taking their jockeys hostage and leaving a gang of squealing ponies in their wake.

Shouldn't joke, really, as it was an injury to Cyborg that caused the cock-up. Still, not many horses died over the three days. Far for the racecourse, really. As one of those vegetarian bleeding hearts who believe that non-human animals should have roughly the same rights as the homo sapiens variety, anything I have to say on the subject would be crushingly predictable, so I'll finish before I start.

During the Cheltenham Festival, any self-respecting television reviewer's mission is clear: cancel the afternoons, settle down with a notepad and ample supplies of a favoured in-

toxicant, and wait for inspiration to flow. Stuck in the office this week, I didn't have that option, and had to view most of the proceedings from the back of a jolly-punters' scrum, but still, three days of elite racing amid a Bacchanalian free-for-all set in a rural idyll fit like the Côte d'Azur should have provided plenty of material.

Except for the fact that, as I came to realise over the three days, I really don't care about racing. I mean really, not in the slightest. The only thoughts I do have are for the high-calibre horseflesh induced by a mixture of cajoling and punishment to operate at maximum capacity for a few minutes in order to keep the bookmakers in business.

Still, there were a few sights to behold, such as the Queen Mother arriving in a borrowed Popemobile. There was nearly a national tragedy when one horse flicked its head penitently as the nonagenarian icon gave it a pre-race once-over, almost landing a blow on the royal bounce. You can see the caption: "Get that bl**dy woman away from me. Doesn't she know I'm a republican?"

There was plenty of upper-class silliness, especially among the owners, though my favourites were the owners of Upgrade, a winner on Thursday, who in all their Brummie arriviste glory came on like Harry Enfield's self-made "considerably-richer-than-you" pair of horrors. "Up the Brits!"

shrieked the woman in an unwitting but brutal self-caricature. It's moments like this that bring home the notion that some people have too much money and too much time on their hands.

There was also the appalling Leslie Graham, who seemed to have wandered in from some dressage event next door and found herself by the rail with a microphone stuck in her hand, asking questions of a Gary Newbunesque gaucheness. I'm told that some trainers forbid winning jockeys from talking to her, and it would be nice to think that perhaps this was a quality control thing. "You're not to open your mouth to her until she comes up with some decent bloody questions!" Ap-

parently, though, it's simply because they have old-fashioned ideas that the riders' first words should be to the trainers and owners themselves, which seems fair enough.

I never like slagging off sportsmen for linguistic infelicities - it's rather like criticising Barry Davies for his pathetic inability to do a decent man-marking job on Ryan Giggs. But there was a delightful if brief outbreak of the "literally" syndrome after the Gold Cup from the winning jockey, Andrew Thornton. Questioned by Brough Scott (who, for all his experience as an interviewer, is like Graham without the riding togs), he proffered the view that, "this puts the icing on my season - literally," followed a



Queen of the castle: Paula Radcliffe, pipped for gold by Derartu Tulu at last year's cross country championships in Turin, is Britain's best hope of a medal in Marrakesh.

Photograph: Michael Steele

Radcliffe's chance to atone for missing title

PAULA RADCLIFFE has been a world champion for six seconds. She hopes to discover in Marrakesh this weekend what it feels like to hold that distinction for a longer period of time.

At last year's world cross country championships in Turin, the 24-year-old thought she had done enough to secure a senior title to add to the junior version she won in the snow of Boston seven years ago.

As she drove towards the finishing line, she allowed herself to believe that she had won - until Derartu Tulu, Ethiopia's Olympic 10,000 metres champion of 1992, sprinted home to take the gold.

It is an attitude she says she has inherited from her mother Pat, a deputy headmistress. "I like to do things properly or not at all," Radcliffe says.

For such a character, the experience in Turin was hugely frustrating, even if it did reflect huge credit upon an athlete who, three years earlier, had been told by a medical special-

ist that a foot injury might prevent her ever running again.

But at least gave her a tangible reward for the talent which has been developed with such painstaking care by her coaches at Bedford and County Athletics Club, Alec and Rosemary Stanton. In her last two major championships on the track, the Olympics and the worlds, she finished the 5,000m a tantalising fifth and fourth respectively.

This weekend, the Stantons - who have coached her since she was a 12-year-old also-ran - will be with her in Morocco as she seeks to go one better than she did in Italy last year.

That task has been complicated by the new format which has been introduced by the International Amateur Athletic Association, which has split the race into longer and shorter versions, over eight and four kilometres, which will be run today and tomorrow respectively.

Radcliffe, who recalls how exhausted she was after Turin, is likely to concentrate on to-

day's longer race, where she may or may not be facing her nemesis. Tulu is injured, but the Ethiopians have left a place open just in case she recovers.

Although the Briton feels the IAAF's action has diluted the strength of this event, she still faces the possibility of strong challenges from former champion Gete Wami of Ethiopia, and Ireland's former world 5,000m champion Sonia O'Sullivan.

Radcliffe, who recalls how exhausted she was after Turin, is likely to concentrate on to-

its main administrative body collapse last October, is on something of a roll at the moment following the success at the European indoor championships, where Jonathan Edwards won an expected gold and Ashia Hansen - also in the triple jump - and 3,000m runner John Maycock won unexpected titles.

Further success from Radcliffe, who has been training at altitude in Albuquerque, would maintain a welcome high profile for the sport.

She is unlikely to be surprised by other British medalists. The men's team - from which the former European

cross country champion Jon Brown has remained absent as he concentrates on preparing for this year's London Marathon - is not likely to make any impact upon the African nations who have virtually adopted this event in recent years.

Paul Tergat, Kenya's world 10,000m record holder, is expected to lead his team to their 13th consecutive team title as he himself seeks a fourth individual title.

In the shorter men's event, Daniel Komen, who broke the 5,000m world record in Brussels last year, is overwhelming favourite.

He said: "I'm highly motivated and this will get the competitive juices going. I've got some unfinished business to attend to and hopefully this time I will finish.

"I'm here to complement Will and Craig, who are going for the championship. I'm not. But I have an open contract with Ford and I'm ruling nothing out in the future, either in this country or America."

"I never retired, I merely had a sabbatical. It wasn't right for me at this stage to do a full season, but the clincher was the chance to race at three historic circuits and hopefully bring the fans along to watch."

While he is content to play the supporting role in the Mondeo, he professed his astonishment that Coulthard surrendered victory, after a first-corner pact, to Hakkinen in Melbourne.

Mansell said: "If the championship was over I would not have a problem with it, but I was confused because it was the first corner of the first race. You don't give away four points unless you have a crystal ball and know you're going to get them back. I hope David doesn't regret it. What happened is not good for the sport."

"I would say David and Mike have an equal chance of winning the championship. The person who is more consistent will win it. McLaren have done an outstanding job."

"The other thing about Formula One now is that there are too many driver aids. Don't get me wrong, Formula One is the pinnacle but there are too many computer-controlled aids. I just think a driver should drive the car and carry it around. The good thing about touring cars is that the driver has a lot of input and the public can relate to the cars."

Leander on pole

Rowing

By Hugh Macleod

THE Tideway Head of the River Race from Chiswick to Putney today is likely to be dominated by Leander Club, the home of most of the leading men's group in the British National team.

Leander has the World Championship coxed four of James Cracknell, Steve Redgrave, Tim Foster and Matthew Pinsent at its core and will lead off in front of University of London and two predominantly lightweight crews, one from London and the other from Notts County at three o'clock.

Oxford Brookes University, now one of the strongest clubs, will start sixth in front of the leading overseas crew, SC Zurich, from Switzerland.

Fogarty trails in Slight's wake

Motor cycling

By Andrew Martin

THE Tideway Scullers' School has a crew of genuine scullers, including the triple world lightweight champion Peter Haining at stroke, backed up by Guy Pooley, Wade Hall Craggs and Boris Mavra.

Molesey, with a crew of Olympic medallists, including the Searle brothers and Richard Stanhope, have been wallowing in the wake of first the Oxford and then the Cambridge Boat Race crews in practice but should move up from 20th.

The perfect weather conditions forecast, combined with a good flow of land water, will make for a fast time and Leander will have no inhibitions in proving the value of the first winner when the entire national team has been properly funded for full-time training. The gap between the full-timers and the rest is expected to increase sharply.

ing of yesterday's opening qualifying times in Phillip Island, Australia. Aaron Slight, Fogarty's former Honda team-mate, shattered his own lap record to take the fastest time.

There is no love lost between the New Zealander and Fogarty, so the man with the famously intense stare will no doubt blink twice at his own qualification time: he finished the session joint fourth, a little over 0.6sec behind the leader.

Fogarty was the runner-up in the series last year to the American John Kocinski, who has switched to Honda's 500cc grands prix effort. Fogarty himself has also moved teams, linking up with the Performance crew managed by the former racer Davide Tardozzi. And happy he is too with the arrangement.

"I have a really good set-up, much better than last year. We are all pulling together. I feel

good with them, and they are working with me to get the bike how I want it," he said.

He needs to. This season is far from a two-horse race with the rapid Australian Troy Corser recording blistering times in the pre-season. In Misano, Corser cropped Kocinski's lap record. Then there is the unpredictable Teddington, who have Luke Hodges on his return after knee surgery, and tomorrow they move a little further south to take on Guildford.

Guildford, despite a recent run of good results, are still not out of the relegation zone. Their player-coach Ian Jennings injured a hand in the Inter-Services on Wednesday and damaged it again on Thursday.

"The real challenge will come from Slight. He is very motivated, has not won anything, and probably realises that this year is his last real chance of the taking the crown."

Leaders' tough trip

Hockey

By Bill Colwill

CANTERBURY, three points behind Cannock, are at home to the two bottom clubs - Beeston and London and Doncaster tomorrow.

England and Scotland battles are always something rather special and this weekend's two women's games at Lilleshall are unlikely to be an exception. Scotland, who have already announced their World Cup squad for Utrecht in May, will be parading their selected squad on both days while England, who do not make their choice until the end of the month, will be using all 22 players from their training squad.

• The International Hockey Federation has announced that the no offside experimental rule is to become permanent and that as from 2 July no more substitutions, except for injury, will be allowed at penalty corners.

ENST places its bid for Wembley

THE English National Stadium Trust yesterday finalised its bid to buy Wembley Stadium and begin a £200m redevelopment.

Arsenal last week announced that they had made a formal offer to purchase the stadium as their new home because of fierce local opposition to their plans to increase their 38,000-capacity at Highbury.

Wembley plc now has until the end of the month to decide between the two offers, which could be as high as £120m. The ENST's bid is backed by the UK Sports Council and the Football Association.

The Sports Minister, Tony Banks, welcomed the ENST's bid and urged Wembley plc to press ahead with contractual negotiations for the new English national stadium to ensure the

project can proceed on schedule. "I am delighted that following discussions between the English Sports Council and the FA an agreed Trust bid has been made," Banks said.

"Lottery funds have been earmarked for a new national stadium which will serve English national teams – including football, rugby league and athletic events – and provide a neutral venue for the climax of major club competitions. This is what sports fans want. Importantly, this bid will be a key component of bids to attract the World Cup in 2006, future Olympics and other international events to this country."

Meanwhile the World Cup campaign director, Alec McGivern, has warned that if Arsenal succeed in buying Wembley it

would be a major blow to the bid to bring the tournament home for the first time in 40 years.

Michael Owen could become the youngest ever winner of the Professional Footballers' Association's Player of the Year award. The Liverpool 18-year-old has been shortlisted in his first full season in senior football. Other names on the shortlist include Arsenal's Dennis Bergkamp and Manchester United's Andy Cole.

Leeds have snapped up Jamie McMaster, a 15-year-old Australian who went to the same Sydney school as their striker Harry Kewell. McMaster has just won a scholarship with the New South Wales Soccer Academy and will join Leeds in the summer of 1999.

Leicester have turned down

an undisclosed bid from hard-up Portsmouth for Steve Claridge. The Leicester manager Martin O'Neill is adamant he will not let Claridge leave on the cheap after recalling the 31-year-old striker from his loan spell at Fratton Park. O'Neill said: "Portsmouth have made a tentative bid but it falls well short of our valuation. There are many ifs, buts and maybes."

Blackburn Rovers are looking to increase their capacity at Ewood Park to 40,000. Further redevelopment of the stadium is planned with a new 15,000-seat stand in the pipeline.

It would mean Rovers demolishing the existing Walker-steel Stand which was not part of the massive redevelopment of Ewood earlier this decade.

Blackburn are anxious to

increase their spectator capacity and their chief executive John Williams said: "It is part of an overall club plan to keep us ahead of the game. We need to have a bigger capacity as we look to continue to move forward. We are making moves to increase our supporter base outside the direct geographic boundaries and the new stand is all part and parcel of it."

Wolverhampton Wanderers yesterday signed the Rangers right-back Stephen Wright on loan until the end of the season. The 26-year-old, who has two full Scottish caps from the early 1990s, goes straight into the Wolves side for today's First Division game at Ipswich.

Since moving to Ibrox for £1.5m from Aberdeen in 1995, Wright has been beset by knee

injury problems and has had two cruciate operations.

"I have had a season in Rangers' reserves and I am now fit," he said. "I was sitting at home preparing for a reserve game at Dunfermline when the call came through that Wolves wanted to sign me. I'm delighted to be joining another big club."

The Aston Villa manager John Gregory is to offer new contracts to his goalkeeper Mark Bosnich and the midfielder Lee Hendrie.

The Villa striker Savo Milosevic has been named in Yugoslavia's squad for their friendly with Colombia next Wednesday in Bogota. The Tottenham striker Jürgen Klinsmann has been named in Germany's squad for the friendly with Brazil on the same day.

SIDELINES

Blues and Blades trade in the black

FRED EYRE is the self-confessed Manchester City "nut" whose devotion survived a free transfer after he had been the club's first-ever apprentice, but today his professional interest is helping the FA Cup semi-finalists Sheffield United to accelerate City's slide towards third-grade football.

Eyre, now the chief scout for United, became a cult author in Northern sporting circles with the publication of *Kicked Into Touch* in 1981. The book hilariously chronicled the life and times of a failed footballer (20-odd clubs but only one League appearance), for Bradford Park Avenue in a 5-0 stuffing by Swans.

Willie Donachie's inside knowledge of United could help to counter Eyre's reports. Barely a month after he gave up coaching them to become Joe Royle's No 2 at City, the Scot followed Joe Mercer and Howard Kendall in being involved in the management of both clubs. Kendall, coincidentally, left each of them for Everton, where his deputy is another who served Blues and Blades alike, Adrian Heath.

David White and Michel Vonk, once Heath's colleagues at Maine Road, are now on the Bramall Lane books, while Paul Beesley (currently on loan to West Bromwich) made the reverse trip. Others who played for both clubs include Brian Gayle, Jamie Hoyland, Carl Bradshaw, Alan Harper, Ken McNaught, Simon Tracy and the striker whose misheard surname sparked a craze among City fans for waving blow-up bananas, Imre Varadi.

Ten things that Forest's Dutchman Pierre van Hooijdonk might be missing today



- 1 Biking to work. The Netherlands has more cycle paths per square mile than any other European country.
- 2 The cafe society of Amsterdam, although it has been said that a bad afternoon at the City Ground is similar to an afternoon in a coffee shop. Both render you strangely numb and crying with hysterical laughter.
- 3 A night in the Leidseplein entertainment district of Amsterdam. Safer and less seedy than a Saturday in Nottingham.
- 4 Windmills.
- 5 The Alkmaar cheese market on Fridays.
- 6 Tulips.
- 7 The world's largest garden at Keukenhof. Like Forest, its beauty is said to be an enigma. Unlike Forest, it attracts 800,000 in the eight weeks per year that it is open.
- 8 Pottering around in Delft, home of the Netherlands' china industry.
- 9 Liberalism.
- 10 Dykes. Forest may find one useful if they return to the Premiership and want to avoid shipping goals and going straight back down again.

NAME OF THE GAME No 27: THE GABLE ENDIES

Five clubs have a nickname as unlikely as Montrose's, but the derivation of the name is less than romantic. The Scottish Third Division club are so called because of a style of house building popular in the town.

THIS WEEK

On 22 March last year, Sunderland met Nottingham Forest. The match finished 1-1, leaving Forest 19th in the Premiership and Sunderland three places higher.

While the sides were both happy to have come away with a point, they were envious of their then fellow strugglers (and current fellow high flyers) Middlesbrough, who beat Chelsea 1-0 to take all three points in their game and move clear of the relegation zone.

Chelsea, who meet Boro in the Coca-Cola Cup final next week, may take heed from another event this week last year. Liverpool reached the semi-final of the Cup-Winners' Cup, "Liverpool back in the European big time," said one headline, somewhat prematurely.

THIS WEEK'S TRANSFERS

Free transfers or understood fees unless stated

Jamie Pollock (midfielder) Bolton to Manchester City (£200,000)	David Bremner (defender) Norwich to Charlton (£200,000)	Tony Scott (midfielder) Manchester City to Queens Park Rangers (£200,000)	Steve Davis (defender) Barnsley to Oxford United (£75,000)	Mike Starbuck (forward) Oldham to Stevenage (loan)
Vince Barron (goalkeeper) Arsenal to Gillingham	Steve Galvin (forward) Nottingham Forest to Crewe	Andy Dales (midfielder) Oldham to Notts County	Steve Wright (defender) Rangers to Wolves	Paul Ince (defender) Manchester City to Macclesfield
Lee Miskin (midfielder) Huddersfield to Hearts	Mike Quinn (defender) Huddersfield to Crewe	John Hartson (defender) NEC Nijmegen (loan) to Boro	Ray Kelly (midfielder) Manchester City to Viking Stavanger (loan)	Steve Watson (midfielder) Notts County to Bolton (trial)
Paul Stevenson (forward) York to Hartlepool	Steve McClaren (forward) Manchester City to Exeter	Paddy Connolly (forward) Airdrie to St Johnstone	Adrian Littlejohn (forward) Plymouth to Oldham	
Steve Watson (midfielder) Hartlepool to Macclesfield	Steve McManaman (forward) Manchester City to Exeter	Alan Moore (forward) Dunfermline to Livingston		
Ben Sedgecombe (midfielder) Mansfield to Macclesfield	Paul Ince (defender) Macclesfield to Crewe	Vince Johnson (midfielder) Oldham to Stevenage		
John Hartson (defender) NEC Nijmegen (loan) to Boro	Mike Quinn (defender) Huddersfield to Crewe	Mike Quinn (defender) Huddersfield to Stevenage		
Paul Stevenson (forward) York to Hartlepool	Steve Galvin (forward) Nottingham Forest to Crewe	Mike Quinn (defender) Huddersfield to Stevenage		
Steve Watson (midfielder) Notts County to Bolton (trial)	Steve McManaman (forward) Manchester City to Exeter	Steve Wright (defender) Rangers to Wolves		
Adrian Littlejohn (forward) Plymouth to Oldham	Steve Watson (midfielder) Notts County to Bolton (trial)	Ray Kelly (midfielder) Manchester City to Viking Stavanger (loan)		
		Steve Watson (midfielder) Notts County to Bolton (trial)		

Contributors: Phil Shaw, Nick Harris, Paul Newman
Readers' contributions welcome. Send to **Sidelines**, Sports Desk, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL
e-mail address: sport@independent.co.uk

Aaron Lawrence, one of Jamaica's goalkeepers, trains at Ealing, west London, yesterday in preparation for tomorrow's game against Queen's Park Rangers. Photograph: Peter Jay

Loftus Road the first stop for Jamaica

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS and Santos of Brazil have little in common, but they will soon have had a shared experience. Along with sides as diverse as Wales, Saudi Arabia and South Korea, they will have met the Reggae Boyz of Jamaica on the football field and experienced the hype surrounding them off it.

Since 16 November last year, when Jamaica became the first English-speaking Caribbean nation to qualify for the World Cup finals (and the island was granted a public holiday), the Reggae Boyz have become national heroes. As they prepare to meet Queen's Park Rangers tomorrow, and Wales in Cardiff next Wednesday, optimism is running high.

"There is a tremendous feeling in Jamaica. Everyone is singing and praying for the football team," the president of the Jamaican Football Federation, Captain Horace Burrell, said yesterday at a reception at the Jamaican High Commission.

in London. "It has given the nation so much hope. They are an inspiration to show people what they can achieve."

There are currently seven English-based players in the squad. Darryl Powell, the Derby midfielder, became the latest addition this week, joining his clubmate Deon Burton, Fitzroy Simpson and Paul Hall of Portsmouth, Robbie Earle and Marcus Gayle of Wimbledon, and Frank Sinclair of Chelsea.

These players may become central to the World Cup squad, but it was primarily Jamaican-based players spearheaded by the forward Andy Williams, who did most to secure qualification over the past two years.

Questions have been asked whether the players' varied origins may present difficulties come the summer, but Jamaica's coach, the Brazilian Rene Simoes, said last week that there was not a problem. "I hold discussions with [long-standing squad members] to evaluate whether these [over-

seas-based] players will fit in with the team chemistry while they are trying out before inviting them officially to join the squad," he said. The Simoes approach would appear to be supported by the fans at home. Last month, the English-based Deon Burton was voted Jamaican's Sportsman of the Year.

The island's previous attempts to qualify for the World Cup were less successful than this time. Their first two efforts, for the 1966 and 1970 tournaments, were fruitless. Their campaign running up to 1974 ended in ignominy after 17 players were suspended for bad behaviour on a tour to Bermuda, and Jamaica withdrew to restructure their side.

They failed to qualify in 1978 and did not even attempt to get to Spain in 1982 due to

insufficient funds and a poorly prepared team. In 1986, they were unable to attempt to qualify because they had failed to pay their Fifa affiliation fees, and in 1990 and 1994 they were simply not good enough.

Under Simoes, however, Jamaica have become the powerhouse of Caribbean football. In 1996 they were awarded Fifa's "Best Mover" accolade. In February this year they finished a respectable fourth in the Gold Cup tournament, and they currently stand at No 33 in the world rankings and fear nobody.

On their current tour, the side will play up to 12 games in six countries in 10 weeks. Although their schedule will take them as far afield as the Far East and Iran, it will not be too taxing, according to officials.

The appeal of the side has

"Jamaica's situation is unique," Horace Reid, the general secretary of the JFF, said. "The players based in Jamaica are not playing in top leagues day-to-day, and need that experience. We need to give the players the maximum exposure possible." He added that the English-based players will not be expected to play in all the warm-up games.

Whoever eventually represents Jamaica in France, Bernard Burrell, a London-based correspondent for Radio Jamaica, said the success of the team will have repercussions far beyond the island. "It's no longer just a Jamaican thing," he said. "It goes beyond political and cultural boundaries. This is a phenomenon." He added that the team have fanatical support throughout the Caribbean and large fan bases in the United States, Britain and Africa. "I've even had Nigerians coming up to me saying that they want to see the Jamaica games."

The Reggae Boyz' World Cup odyssey is expected to generate in excess of £10m for football at grass-roots level in Jamaica. That might mean it will not take another 32 years before they qualify for the World Cup.

It is estimated these debts could be rising by around £30,000 a month. Although the club can expect a financial boost from their Scottish Cup semi-final appearance against Hearts, a significant amount of the club's rising debts.

After lecturing his players on the lessons they must absorb if they want to lift the title, Jansen took his team aside this week to talk through what went wrong last Sunday at home to Dundee United, when Celtic let a one-goal lead slip in reckless pursuit of a decisive second strike.

That meant a chance to move seven points clear at the top of the Premier Division was spurned. Jansen said: "Against Dundee United we played very well in the first half, but lost our shape at times in the second half 1-1, and we have spoken

about this problem because it is very important for the way we want to play."

With Eoin Jess back in form and the Scotland squad, Celtic will miss the influence of Alan Stubbs (groin) at the back on a day when defeat, if Rangers were to win at home, would transform the championship picture.

Rangers recall their 31-year-old midfielder Ian Durrant to the squad that faces St Johnstone at Ibrox. Walter Smith's side lie five points adrift of Celtic and three behind second-placed Hearts. He will be able to call on the midfielder Jonas Themi, who returns from suspension, but both Paul Gascoigne (ankle and stomach injuries) and Brian Laudrup (back) will miss the game.

St Johnstone are chasing

their first double over Rangers in 27 years after winning at McDiarmid Park earlier in the season. But their manager, Paul Sturrock, knows they face a daunting 90 minutes at Ibrox. "Rangers are in a must-win situation so we can expect a tough game," he said.

By Alan Nixon

KEVIN GALLACHER will miss Scotland's World Cup warm-up match with Denmark because of a nagging stomach strain. The Blackburn Rovers striker failed a fitness test yesterday and his club manager, Roy Hodgson, withdrew the Scot from the party to face the Danes on Wednesday. Instead, Gallacher will be working on his fitness at the end of a frustrating month in which he has also been suspended for three games. "I would not do my

best any justice for Scotland. I would rather stay here and get myself fit and be back for the next league match," Gallacher said. "My stomach is just not right. I've done a lot of work in training this week, maybe too much. I've had a test but it's not right yet. I will just have to keep working on my recovery programme."

Falkirk travel to Love Street for a First Division match against St Mirren today believing they can still fulfil their fixtures. It is understood they are £1.5m in debt, with the Inland Revenue owed £400,000 of that sum and

placed Hearts. He will be able to call on the midfielder Jonas Themi, who returns from suspension, but both Paul Gascoigne (ankle and stomach injuries) and Brian Laudrup (back) will miss the game.

St Johnstone are chasing their first double over Rangers in 27 years after winning at McDiarmid Park earlier in the season. But their manager, Paul Sturrock, knows they face a daunting 90 minutes at Ibrox. "Rangers are in a must-win situation so we can expect a tough game," he said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER JAY

Chelsea to face Italian challenge

By Catherine Riley

CHelseA, England's sole representatives in Europe following the exits of Aston Villa and Manchester United earlier this week, have been drawn against Vicenza in the semi-finals of the European Cup-Winners' Cup.

Following a nervous start to Thursday's quarter-final second leg, Chelsea completed a 3-2 aggregate victory against Real Betis. Their next opponents were in even more impressive scoring form, beating the Dutch side Roda JC Kerkrade 5-1 on the night, 9-1 on aggregate.

However, despite that performance, the Italian side are struggling in the bottom half of Serie A, which has given Chelsea hope of reaching their first European final for 27 years.

The Chelsea player-coach, Gianluca Vialli, was delighted after his side avoided the favourites, VfB Stuttgart, who must play Lokomotiv Moscow, but said: "Whoever we drew in the semi-finals was going to be very tough. It's a lottery really."

"Vicenza are not doing very well in the league, but that's because I'm sure they've been concentrating on European competition. They have no superstars, nobody in the Italian national team, but they're a team who play for each other. I've played against Vicenza many times over many years - first of all in the lower division when I was with Cremonese.

"It's going to be very interesting going there now with

three Italians in our side. I know their manager quite well and he's an excellent organiser.

Their ground is quite tight and the crowd are close to the pitch, a bit like an English stadium. And I'm not so sure it is best for us to play away first.

"So long as we go there and play positively and don't make too many silly mistakes we can do it. But we can't play for 0-0

European Cup

Semi-finals

Juventus (It) v Monaco (Fr)
Real Madrid (Sp) v Borussia Dortmund (Ger)

First leg 1 April, second leg 15 April

Cup-Winners' Cup

Semi-finals

Vicenza (It) v Chelsea (Eng)
VfB Stuttgart (Ger) v Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)

First leg 2 April, second leg 16 April

Uefa Cup

Semi-finals

Atletico Madrid (Sp) v Lazio (It)
Internazionale (It) v Spartak Moscow (Rus)

First leg 31 March, second leg 14 April

in the away leg. We are not very good at that, it seems.

"And in any case, it is dangerous to try to play for 0-0. It can make the home leg very tense and I believe it is better to risk a few mistakes in the first leg by trying to score goals instead of leaving everything up to the home game."

Vicenza's next two Serie A games are against Roma at home tomorrow and away to Milan the following Saturday, and Vialli will send two of his

coaching staff, Graham Rix and Eddie Niedzwiecki, and also his assistant manager Gwyn Williams to spy on them while he concentrates on next Sunday's Coca-Cola Cup final against Middlesbrough.

In the draw for the semi-finals of the European Cup, last season's finalists Juventus and Borussia Dortmund remained on course for a rematch in the final.

Dortmund, who beat the Italian champions Juventus 3-1 in last year's final in Munich, will face Real Madrid, while Juve, bidding for their third successive final, were drawn against Monaco, who ousted Manchester United on the away goals rule at Old Trafford.

For Monaco, the only club left in the competition never to have won the title - or any European competition - the draw was not what they wanted.

"This is the most difficult draw that could have happened to us," their technical director, Hervé Bienczech, said. "Everyone wanted to play us, but we drew United and we are still here. All the teams have won many titles and we've won nothing up to now, so we just have to work with what we have."

In the Uefa Cup, Lazio and Internazionale also avoided each other, raising the possibility of an all-Italian final and an Italian clean sweep in all three competitions. Inter, last season's losing Uefa Cup finalists, will play Spartak Moscow, while Lazio drew Atletico Madrid, the conquerors of Aston Villa.

Champions now

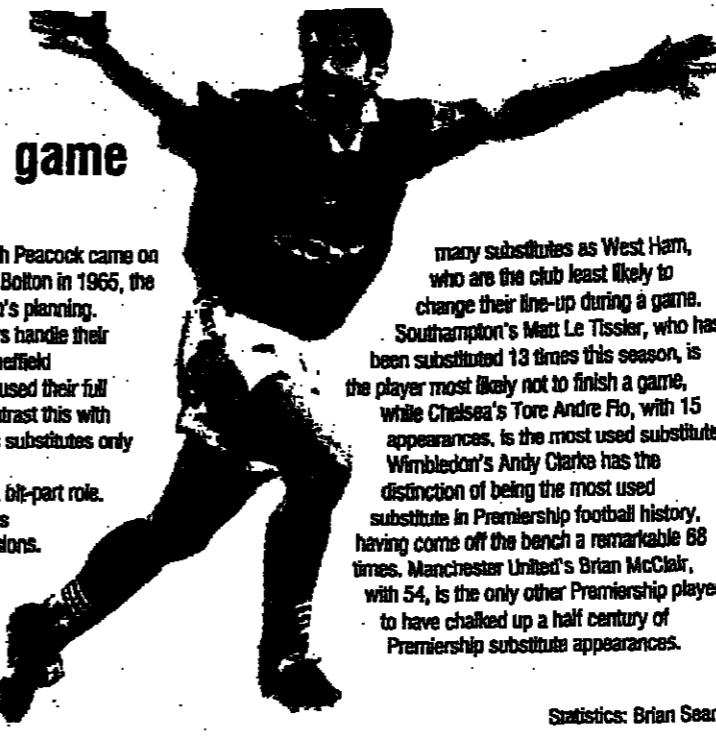
How Premiership teams play the 14-man game

Eleven men against eleven? Not any more. Ever since Keith Peacock came on as the first Football League substitute for Charlton against Bolton in 1965, the role of the replacement has been a crucial part in any team's planning. Yet there is a great difference in the way different managers handle their substitutes. For example, in the Premiership this season Sheffield Wednesday, Tottenham, Southampton and Barnsley have used their full complement of 14 players in at least half their games. Contrast this with Coventry's Gordon Strachan, who has used all three of his substitutes only twice.

Andy Liddell (pictured) is the player most used to having a bit-part role. He has made 23 Premiership appearances for Barnsley this season but has completed 90 minutes on only three occasions.

He has been substituted 10 times and has come on as substitute 10 times. Last week he surprised himself by coming on in the first half against Southampton and then making way for another substitute in the second half.

Only Sheffield Wednesday use more substitutes than Barnsley. Wednesday have used exactly twice as



many substitutes as West Ham, who are the club least likely to change their line-up during a game.

Southampton's Matt Le Tissier, who has been substituted 13 times this season, is the player most likely not to finish a game, while Chelsea's Tore Andre Flo, with 15 appearances, is the most used substitute. Wimbledon's Andy Clarke has the distinction of being the most used substitute in Premiership football history, having come off the bench a remarkable 88 times. Manchester United's Brian McBride, with 54, is the only other Premiership player to have chalked up a half century of Premiership substitute appearances.

Statistics: Brian Sear

The 14-man game

How Premiership clubs use substitutes

Club	Games	Number of subs	Average sub/game	Times all three subs used
Sheffield Wednesday	30	74	2.47	17
Barnsley	29	70	2.41	15
Tottenham	38	72	2.40	16
Southampton	30	71	2.37	15
Aston Villa	22	61	2.78	10
Derby	29	63	2.17	12
Everton	30	65	2.17	12
C Palace	30	63	2.10	11
Leicester	29	59	2.08	7
Man Utd	31	82	2.66	12
Chelsea	30	59	1.97	9
Blackburn	29	57	1.97	8
Wimbledon	28	50	1.79	7
Liverpool	30	49	1.63	6
Newcastle	29	45	1.55	4
Coventry	29	42	1.45	2
Bolton	29	41	1.41	3
Leeds	30	42	1.40	5
Aston Villa	31	42	1.35	4
West Ham	29	37	1.28	3

Super subs

The most used substitutes

Andy Clarke (Wimbledon)	68
Brian McBride (Man Utd)	54
Graham Fenton (Leicester)	44
...and season by season	
Stuart Barlow (Everton)	18
Stuart Barlow (Everton)	16
Alex Mathie (Newcastle)	16
Gordon Watson (Sheff Wed)	16
Jon Goodman (Wimbledon)	16
Paul Simpson (Derby)	19

Changing faces

Number of players used by Premiership teams this season

Everton	33	Derby	26
Crystal Palace	32	Manchester United	26
Sheffield Wednesday	31	Newcastle	26
Southampton	29	Bolton	25
Tottenham	28	Liverpool	24
West Ham	27	Wimbledon	24
Arsenal	26	Blackburn	23
Barnsley	26	Leicester	22
Chelsea	26	Aston Villa	21
Coventry	26	Leeds	21

Major weekend fixtures and pools check

2.0 unless stated

TODAY

Nationwide League

First Division

1 Birmingham v Notts Forest

2 Bury v Oxford Utd

3 Crewe v Charlton

4 Ipswich v Wolves

5 Man City v Sheffield Utd

6 Reading v Huddersfield

7 Stoke City v QPR

8 Sunderland v Portsmouth

9 Swindon v St Mirren

10 Tranmere v Bradford

11 West Brom v Port Vale

Second Division

12 Blackpool v Gillingham

13 Bradford v Northampton

14 Bristol Rovers v Preston

15 Chesterfield v Carlisle

16 Luton v Grimsby

17 Millwall v Bury

18 Oldham v Watford

19 Plymouth v Bristol City

20 Southend v Bournemouth

21 Walsall v Wigan

22 Wrexham v Wycombe

23 York v Fulham

Third Division

24 Brighton v Cambridge

25 Doncaster v Lincoln

26 Hull v Cardiff

27 Leyton Orient v Derby

28 Macclesfield v Shrewsbury

29 Mansfield v Exeter

30 North County v Colchester

31 Peterborough v Chester

32 Rochdale v Hartlepool

33 Scunthorpe v Rotherham

34 Swindon v Scarborough

35 Torquay v Barnet

Bell's Scottish League

Premier Division

36 Aberdeen v Celtic

37 Dundee Utd v Hearts

38 Hibernian v Motherwell

39 Kilmarnock v Dunfermline

40 Rangers v St Johnstone

First Division

41 Airdrie v Stirling Albion

42 Hamilton v Dundee (20)

43 Morton v Partick

44 Raith v Ayre

45 St Mirren v Falkirk

Second Division

46 Brechin v Clyde

47 Inverness CT v Queen of the South

48 Stenhousemuir v Clydebank

Coaching overhaul means end of era

Glenn Moore
goes back to the
classroom where a
revolution in English
football is taking place

IT WAS long ago, Bobby Moore was still playing for England and the Bay City Rollers singing for Scotland. I had just turned 10 and was about to play on a full-sized football pitch for the first time.

It is not an experience you forget. The pitch seemed vast but Mr Hawkins, who "coached" the school football team, knew how to stop us running after the ball in a pack. "Your dad was a right-back, so you play there. Stay on that side and don't cross the half-way line."

That memory came back this week as the English Schools FA lamented the end of an era. The victory over Brazil last Saturday was the last Wembley international to be run by the blazers and mortar boards. Now the professionals, led by Howard Wilkinson, the FA's Technical Director, will be in charge of youth development.

The change is part of a revolution in English coaching as outlined in Wilkinson's Charter for Quality. Among the most significant measures is a belated overhaul of the coaching system to ensure well-meaning amateurs will not be replaced by unsuitable professionals.

Two years ago I took the FA Preliminary Coaching Badge, the lower tier qualification. A 30-hour course spent entirely on the training pitch – apart from a basic examination on the laws of the game – it was interesting and instructive but fundamentally flawed. There was no mention of nutrition, physiology, sports medicine, injuries, warm-ups or warm-downs. Those who passed were unleashed on players with no further supervision and no requirement to keep their knowledge up to date.

The course was at least 25 years old and it showed. Glenn Hoddle had not bothered doing it, or the full badge, the upper qualification, nor had many other managers from park to Premiership.

Last month I took the Prelim's replacement, the FA coaching certificate. Costing £90 it was designed in accordance with Uefa guidelines and in conjunction with the Professional Footballers' Association and Loughborough University. It was launched amid fanfare by the likes of Alex Ferguson and Steve Heighway last autumn, but would it be any better?

Early indications were not promising. At around 9am one Monday just over 30 of us wandered into the University of London's playing fields near Wimbledon and were asked to squeeze into a classroom



Glenn Moore, the Independent's football correspondent, holds forth during his course for the FA coaching certificate at Wimbledon last month

Photograph: David Ashdown

reminiscent of Tom Brown's school-days. There was a blackboard but not enough desks. We gazed wistfully at the pitches outside. A dated Charles Hughes coaching book was passed around. This was the new, singing-and-dancing "modern" course?

It was. For the next 75 minutes we talked about preparation: how to set up a session, the equipment required, aspects of health and safety, warming-up, cooling-down. It was mostly common sense – making sure you had contact numbers for players' next-of-kin and knew where a phone was; checking for things like broken glass that might cause injury – but it needed to be known.

The classroom work, done by in groups and general debate, not lectures, also broke the ice before we headed for the pitches. We were aged 20-45 but mainly in our 30s, all male except Michelle, a teacher, and included students of West Indian,

middle-eastern and Asian descent.

I had been worried about the difficulty of fitting the course around work – it was the week Frank Clark was sacked and Gianluca Vialli held his first press conference – but my concerns were put in perspective by Stuart.

A member of the RAF, he was on standby to go to the Gulf – several close colleagues were already there.

There were other military personnel, several teachers (it was half-term), a hairdresser, a sports masseur, a surveyor, a shipping importer and recently graduated students.

Motives varied. Two already coached professionally, at Fulham and Watford, but wanted to expand their knowledge and gain the formal qualification. Stuart, who was coming out of the RAF, was one of several who wanted to work in America at summer camps. Des and Andy, a father and son, intended to open a football school. Iman, the masseur, wanted an

other string to his bow when working with clubs. "Badge" had been asked to coach his nephew's team and felt he ought to do it properly.

He was not alone. One encouraging aspect for Wilkinson's reform was the number of students who coached local youth or boys' teams and wanted to be better qualified. "It used to be rare," said Mark, who ran an under-12 side, "but now most junior team managers have qualifications."

Most courses are at weekends, this was Monday to Friday, 9.30 till about 4.30, 50 hours in total, plus an evening studying the laws and another doing first aid. The Surrey FA had already held one such course and suffered a considerable drop-out.

The bold response was to run two courses alongside each other, one taken by county coach Keith Boones, the other by Kenny Bremmer, who was on Fulham's youth coaching

staff. Both had been decent non-league players.

The paperwork went on to include attitudes and ethics, physiology, overuse injuries, how to spot and guard against child abuse, nutrition, and further advice on the mechanics of coaching. The Hughes book was used for its training routine, his "direct-play" (old-style Wimbledon) philosophy was not mentioned.

The practical aspect is largely unchanged but there was a greater emphasis on coaching us to coach. We were alternately taught a technique or aspect of the game – such as turning with the ball, or winning the ball back in a small-sided game – then asked to demonstrate how we would coach it. Playing abilities varied, a couple of players struggled to cope, at the other end of the scale a few topped up their regular wages playing non-League on Saturdays.

On the old course you were judged at the end of the practical on your three topics. Now you go away and do 16 hours recorded coaching with adults, half with kids, then come back to be assessed on two further topics. Only then can you pass.

Our reassessment is in May but one problem is doing the coaching. It is a sensible idea but not everyone has access to teams and this is a major reason why people do not come back to complete the course. One student said he had arranged, beforehand, to work with a top Ryman League team but now that he realised how difficult it was he no longer fancied the idea.

Those who pass – and failures can be reassessed without having to do the whole course again – can go on to do the Coaching Licence, and the Advanced Coaching Licence. These two are equivalent to Uefa awards and without the latter you cannot coach the likes of Juventus or Ajax.

They are among the very few pan-

European qualifications in any area of employment and, in time, will be required to coach in the Premiership.

None of my group will reach such heights but all appeared to enjoy and benefit from the week. The course is a significant advance and most coaching professionals support it. It is also very hard work and there were a lot of tired limbs by Friday night.

However Dave Bromley, Sutton's

coaching secretary, noted: "The people who do it are the converted, the ones prepared to make a commitment in time and money. The ones who

need the course, the parents who stand on the touchline and shout 'don't take it'. As Barry Williams, the former Sutton United manager who beat Coventry in the FA Cup, used to say, there are three things every bloke thinks he knows all about: how to drive, how to make love and how to play football."

As Meatloaf said, two out of three ain't bad.

Vase candidates seek respect and a happy day at Wembley

THE prospect of being 90 minutes (plus a replay and penalty shoot-out, if the quarter-finals are any benchmark) from Wembley is doubtless preoccupying fans in Wolverhampton, half of Sheffield, north London (NS) and, to a lesser degree, in Newcastle (where they have less salubrious matters on their minds).

But it has become nothing short of an obsession down in the West Country, and especially in the Potteries town of Kidsgrove and in tiny Tow Law in County Durham, a town put on the map by Chris Waddle, who famously combined skinning sausages with skinning defenders while playing for the Northern League club before swapping their black and white stripes for a more famous variety.

After all, Arsenal (12 visits), Newcastle (11), Wolves (8) and Sheffield United (6) all know what the inside of Wembley looks like, whereas Taunton Town, Tiverton Town, Kidsgrove Athletic and Tow Law Town, who contest the second legs of their FA Carlsberg Vase semi-finals this afternoon, have just two visits to the Twin Towers between them: Tiverton contested the Vase final in 1993, Taunton the following year.

The Tow Law secretary Bernard Fairbairn, whose association with the club goes back 37 years, admits: "We're trying to keep our feet on the ground, but of course we're excited. Tow Law's population is only around 2,000, but we're expecting a crowd of 1,000-plus for this game."



OLIVIA BLAIR
ON THE
NON-LEAGUE
TUSSLE TO
REACH THE
TWIN TOWERS

they didn't take theirs" expects a bit away from the top of the Scunffs Direct Western League – Tiverton are currently bottling it out at the top of the

league, and, the Tiverton manager, Martyn Rogers, who described the first leg as a "hard-fought, close encounter in which we took our chances and they like it that."

That is not to say that it

does not infuriate Williams that football at this level "doesn't get the respect it deserves. Many of these clubs get better crowds than Scottish Second and Third Divisions clubs" (Taunton had 1,569 against Tow Law, while Tiverton had 1,885 against Kidsgrove) but still get little or no press coverage."

Yet the interest is undeniably there: evidence of that comes in the form of the hugely popular non-League equivalent to *Rollmanns*, the *Non-League Directory*, which has featured in the sports best-seller lists since its launch 20 years ago.

In biggest fan is the astrologer and television presenter Russell Grant, a passionate fan of Hillingdon Borough of the Spartan South Midlands League, who have never won the Vase in its 24-year history (it replaced the Amateur Cup in 1974).

Grant will inevitably be at

Wembley on 9 May for the final, but he will not be consulting planetary aspects to predict the winner. The only stars that will have a bearing on the outcome of that game will be those on the pitch.

Tyneside's royals will be quickly forgotten

TYNESIDE will begin the new millennium with something of its own constitutional crisis. The Halls, the royal family Newcastle never thought they needed but whose patriarch assumed monarchical status through a knack for identifying and then regenerating key pastures on various neglected soils on the banks of the Tyne, now have the problem of having no credible successor to the throne of their Wynyard estate.

Douglas Hall, the disgraced Prince and heir to

everything he can see from his bedroom window (and probably all he can see from the window of whoever's bedroom he just so happens to be in), was never likely to be held in the same esteem as his father, but it now seems he will never assume the same unofficial title. After last weekend's headlines, he has apparently gone into hiding.

Freddie Shepherd, his best mate, can never hope to maintain such a low profile, his larger-than-life presence – symbolised by the giant sign

which advertises his scrap metal business – will surely always be apparent to the citizens of Newcastle.

Freddie has always been considered one of us. Having stood on the terraces he has the only essential quality required for a credible board member. As a result he has endured the same torment

that we all shared for so long. Having witnessed the same misery and sorrow, he could be forgotten for the occasional desire for light relief, as I'm sure

Mrs Shepherd will agree.

Perhaps Douglas and Freddie deserve our compassion and understanding. In what has been a very dull season, they made an admirable attempt to resurrect the excitement of the Keegan era and its "cavalier" approach. With a simple mission – let your opponent score as often as they like, as long as you score more – they have

parently travelled the world giving it their best shot. And let's face it, they had more success in Europe with the "you can have four if I get five" approach than Newcastle ever did.

And, after all, a boardroom trying to buy success is not a new thing. This is not the first time our club's upper hierarchy

has paid out a lot of money for a few clapped out old donkeys who put in a few mediocre performances, stroke it

around a bit and show a couple of good touches, only to get on the wrong end of a good thrashing. But at least they used to let me watch.

However calls to Sack The Board have come far too late, as apparently the girls of Marbella's brothels have already sacked them many times.

So even if we do find it

hard to accept the derisory

lives

of

the

I'm still top dog at Sludgethorpe and not eating humble paella



THE GAFFER TAPES

WHAT an escape: saved by a prawn. I still can't believe how lucky I was. There I sat, in the Marbella Club with Freddie and Doug, having an early evening beer or two and chatting to a couple of businessmen we'd met about the Toon, when I suddenly felt this terrible tightening of the stomach.

"Oh Jeez, my guts are killing me," I said to Freddie. "I think I'm going to have to bail out. I must have had a dodgy prawn in that paella."

"N'way the lad," said Doug. "It's gonna be a top night on the tap. We'll get one of the girls to give you a massage in all the right places, that'll cure you."

"Sorry boys, have one for me, I've not got a moment to lose," I said as I left my drink and legged it for the loo.

Franco's revenge has long gone but when I opened my *News of the World* last week I felt that tightening of the stomach again. But for that wonderful rotten prawn that would have been me plastered across the front page. Not that I'd have been rude or daft enough to call Sludgethorpe girls "dogs": they are all top lasses.

It goes to show how careful you've got to be though. You can't trust anyone in this game. Next time I go overseas on a trip like that I'm going to get a disguise and invent a cover story.

I'll everyone I'm a Thy MP, that sounds credible enough.

Talking of politics, the budget wasn't too bad. I thought I'd get hammered but there's no soak-the-rich tax rate for mega-earners like me and I might even get a discount on my car tax. The Ferrari's only two-seater so that must qualify as a small car.

I was a bit disappointed he didn't put the price of Scotch up. I wouldn't have bothered buying six crates of it if I thought it would stay the same rate. At least the 120 cartons of ciggies represent a bit of a saving even if I still don't have anywhere to put them. It's a good job we haven't a game today, I can keep

them in the dressing-room for another week.

Meanwhile, it looks like Boro are going to pinch Gazzetta from me. We kissed and made up last week but I think Sludgethorpe is too far from his local working men's club. I'm sure he'll do a good job for my old mate Robbo.

He's just the bloke to put a curb on Gazzetta's retelling habits but I had to laugh when, early in the week, he said rumours that Gazzetta might go to Boro were "just newspaper talk". A day later he's made a bid.

They must have a communication problem up there, I remember when Emerson signed, the chief executive is

sued a statement slandering the papers saying something along the lines that the stories were scurrilous rubbish and categorically denying he or anyone else at the club had ever had any contact with any bloke called Emerson ever, not even listening to an Emerson, Lake & Palmer LP. An hour later he called a press conference to announce the signing.

Now I'd never mislead the press like that. All a reporter needs to do if he wants the truth out of me is give me a call. If his paper is bunging me 80 grand a year for a series of exclusives I'll tell him, if not I'm in a meeting.

Back to the Gazzetta deal and

miss training to visit a sick aunt.

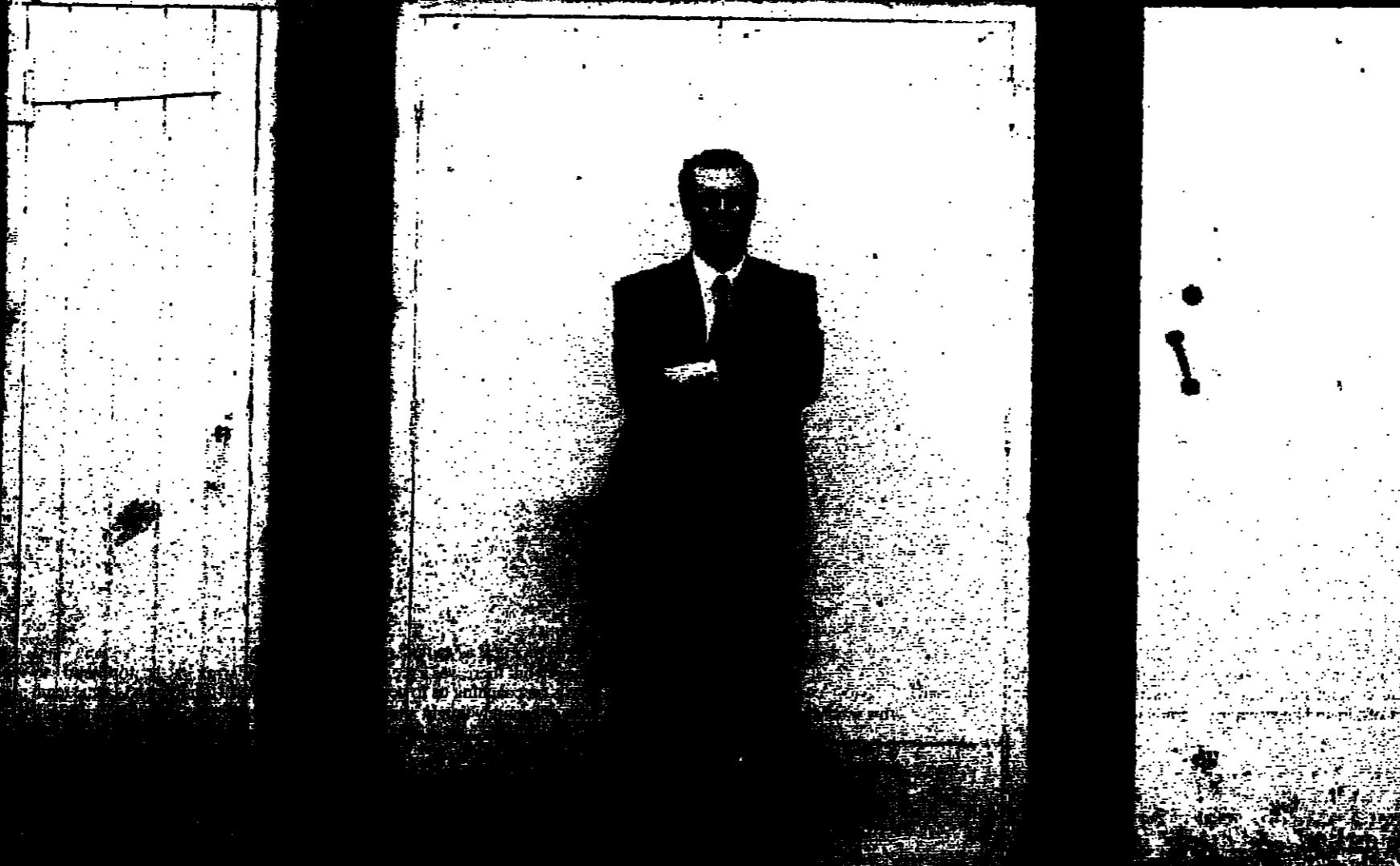
It was also a good warm-up for this weekend as we've come over to Ireland since there's no match. The chairman and I thought the lads deserved a bit of a break and we figured Dublin was perfect. The flights are cheap and the locals speak the same lingo so the lads shouldn't get into any trouble.

Ivor Niggle had to miss out as he's scared of flying and Shaun Prone's apparently caught equine flu off his aunt but the rest are here having a quiet, relaxing time.

Hang on. Oh, got to go, the hotel manager's at the door. And is that a police siren outside - or an ambulance?

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Back to the wall: Paul Weaver, the commercial manager who now helps pick the Rovers team. "I understand the supporters," he says. "They have no one to blame and I'm the only target."

Photograph: Simon Wilkinson

Ugly scenes as last rites played out at Belle Vue

IN OTHER circumstances it might almost be funny. A team that cannot win? A club managed by a man who admits to knowing little about professional football? In Doncaster the plight of the Rovers is anything but amusing - go there and you see a soap opera that is tearing a town apart.

To find a reason why Doncaster are bottom of the Third Division and seemingly heading for disintegration you need only ask anyone in the South Yorkshire town. The fans blame the principal share owners, the man running the club attacks the local council, the town hall looks back to the club's administration; the buck passes with a dizzying, and sickening, speed.

What no one disputes is that Doncaster Rovers will not be a member of the Football League after this season. Their record reads like an accident report: three wins in 38 matches, 97 goals conceded. Add a crum-

pling ground and a club in hock to its creditors and you soon get any inclination to find the situation funny. For a lover of football the situation at Belle Vue is a reason to cry.

The club has only nine professionals, the rest of the laughably named squad being made up of YTS boys. The coaches were laid off last week to save money, the team is being managed by a man whose previous experience at a League club was running Stockport County's lottery; the club is run from scruffy temporary buildings planted on a bomb site that is designated a car park.

"No disrespect to Beirut," Mark Weaver said, pointing to the cratered surface, "but it's like it was there 20 years ago. Look at that and you know you've got problems. The place is a mess."

Weaver is a pivotal figure in the shambles that is Doncaster Rovers. Listen to him and he is the hero who is keeping the club

afloat. Speak to the supporters and he is the front man of the majority shareholder, Ken Richardson, who is awaiting trial on charges related to an arson attack on the main stand in 1995.

Even the supporters accept Weaver is a plausible talker, however, and you hope a meeting with him hoping he is the man of reason trying to sift through the chaos. Brought in originally as commercial manager, he now picks the team with the only coach on the books, Danny Bergara, the former Stockport manager.

"We'd like to do a sympathetic piece about Doncaster," I had said to him on the phone. "No," he replied, "it'll be an hatchet job," he replied. "You might as well be honest." That is the battle-blitzed voice of resignation.

Hatchet. In another person that might be said lightly but Weaver has had death threats. Pictures have been sent to his

house we'd shut down because I couldn't afford to put the picture on."

Weaver's argument is one of broken promises from a local council which itself has been the subject of Labour Party inquiry. A new ground was mooted, he says, a prospect that has not materialised. Nothing was spent on Belle Vue, which is leased from the council, because Doncaster were expecting to move and now financial reality insists that wages of £28,000 per week have been pared to £7,000. The consequences ought to be noted because they could be repeated the length and breadth of the lower divisions.

The make or break point, as far as Weaver is concerned, was a fixture against Fulham two

years ago. Both teams were vying for promotion, it was a big match, but the crowd was just 2,300. "They had their chance," Weaver said, "but they wouldn't support us."

"That's about 1,800 of our own fans which would bring in around £6,000, so in one week Ken Richardson has lost £22,000 in a week just for the sake of watching his team win. How long can a man do that for? I turned round to him and told him: 'You're an idiot. When it fails they'll smack you anyway.' Now my ambition is to ensure we fulfil our league fixtures this season."

They will do that. Only eight matches remain, but they will be played with players plucked from non-League football. After that who knows? According to supporters' groups the GM Vauxhall Conference is at the optimistic end of their expectations.

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"We're in death throes," Charles Walker, the chairman

of the supporters club for 20 years, said, "and slowly being starved of all sustenance. Crowds are down to around 700. In reality people have been driven away. There cannot be a hundred season ticket holders left. We are accelerating into oblivion with Ken Richardson's and Mark Weaver's feet hard down on the pedals."

Save The Rovers Group held a public meeting on Thursday night but the impasse remains over Belle Vue, a piece of desirable real estate just across from the town's famous racecourse. Get planning consent for a new ground and the old stadium could be sold to finance a modern one. "If we had planning permission I could get on the phone and sell the club 50 times over," Weaver said. "Without it and it's worth about £1."

So Rovers play on to a chorus of dissent, suspicions running wild on all sides. There might be bona fide buyers but negotiations seem to break down as often as the team loses. The whole sorry saga has people trapped in a box of distrust.

"If I ran off I'd never live with myself and I don't believe I should because I've done nothing wrong," Weaver said.

"It's not the fans, I feel sorry for them, it's those on the council who I won't let beat me. They're hiding behind Richardson's name. The worst thing that could happen to them is if Richardson sold the club - then they'd have to do something."

Walker and the supporters, meanwhile, labour under no misconceptions. "You sometimes feel it's not worth the effort," he said, "but I'm no longer fighting just for Doncaster. I'm doing this for every other supporter whose club might end up in the same situation."

Brighton, Doncaster, where next?

City's chance to be united as they start life without Lee

LATE in Peter Swales' reign as chairman, Manchester City finished two successive seasons with the Premiership table showing they were the fifth best team in England. Today, as City begin life after Francis Lee with what Joe Royle calls "a massive game" against Sheffield United, they are only the fifth best side in Greater Manchester.

Royle, who will be in charge of the First Division's bottom club if City lose while Reading and Stoke win, hopes that Lee's act of "falling on his sword" may create a belated unity of purpose. But the fans' favourite, Georgi

Kinkladze, will be absent against the FA Cup semi-finalists.

Kinkladze has played only twice under the new manager, on the day he was appointed and in the defeat at Port Vale a week ago today. In the wake of speculation that he was to join Ajax, the Georgian was sent home from training yesterday because of illness.

"He has been running a high temperature for two days, but he is also upset about the club's position," Royle said. "Francis was his mentor so he's been upset about things generally. His performance last week reflected that."

The events of this week may

help us. Francis obviously felt that by leaving he'd take some of the pressure off the players. I'm not saying that certain people have got what they wanted, but there was a faction giving him a hard time and that influenced his decision. I hope we

can help him. Jamie Pollock makes his debut for City following a loan move from Bolton. Royle never quite lived down a tongue-in-cheek reference to his "dogs of war" at Everton, but the combative Pollock will be expected to bring bite and bark to City's midfield.

"We haven't asserted ourselves at home," Royle said, an understatement given that only one other club in the four divisions, Doncaster, are into double figures for home defeats. "But we've got four matches here, and I sense that the lads are keen to put it right."

The events of this week may

Queen's Park Rangers today. Both clubs changed managers in mid-season without the desired effect. Chris Kamara, having lost the Bradford City job after a bad run, has now presided over 12 matches without a win at Stoke, who have a solid victory to show for the last 23 games.

Ray Harford's deflection from West Brom to west London has proved doubly unfortunate. QPR have tumbled into trouble, while his previous club have fallen off the pace in the play-off zone. The presence in the visitors' attack of Mike Sheron, a "Judas" figure to Stoke fans af-

ter his lucrative move last summer, may take some of the heat off a beleaguered board.

It promises to be a weekend for the Nationwide League to show the Premiership that spectator interest is not confined to a self-styled élite. Today's biggest crowd, possibly more than 40,000, will be at Sunderland for the visit of Portsmouth. Middlesbrough, even without Paul Gascoigne, will be close to 30,000 again for tomorrow's match against Norwich, as will Manchester City.

While the north-eastern duo

leaders, Nottingham Forest, may be harder pressed before an anticipated 25,000 gathering at Birmingham. The side managed by the man whose goal once made Forest champions of Europe have lost only twice in 19 games. Birmingham, indeed, now look the West Midlands' best bet for a play-off place.

The first championship of the season looks set to go to Nottingham, but not to Forest. Notts County, the definitive yo-yo club of the 90s, are on course for 100 points in the Third Division and should add to their tally at home to Colchester.

Red Rose wary of Scottish surprises

By Chris Hewett
Rugby Union Correspondent

ENGLAND'S pampered professionals have grown well accustomed to Sabbath rugby over the last couple of seasons but, if they think they can enjoy a lie-in with the papers, sink a couple of quiet ones before lunch, stuff themselves full of roast beef and still score 40 points at Murrayfield tomorrow afternoon, they will be in for a rude awakening. As far as the Scots are concerned, Mothering Sunday is as good a day as any to lay the mother of all surprises.

On paper, Lawrence Dallaglio's men have only to turn up; bigger and meaner in the tight five, more dynamic in the back row and significantly quicker and more clinical out wide, there is barely a chink in the armour – at least, not a

chink sufficiently wide to give the under-powered underdogs a glimmer of hope.

Leaving aside Gregor Townsend and his fly-by-night unpredictability for a second, who among the Scots would stand a snowball in hell's chance of making the England starting line-up?

At which point, English minds invariably drift back to that humiliating afternoon in 1990: the day of David Sole's slow walk into history, Tony Stanger's famous try, Will Carling's terminal indecision, Brian Moore's fatal attack of wild-eyed hubris. Only Sole, a decade ahead of his time as a loose-head prop, would have gained a foothold in that particular Red Rose vintage, but the paper differential did not stop his countrymen playing like men possessed.

Hence the edginess apparent among Dallaglio's squad this week. If it is eight years since England last lost to their longest-standing rugby foe, it is six years since they crossed the Scottish line at Murrayfield. "It wasn't a problem in my day," pointed out Clive Woodward, the England coach. "I seem to remember us running in five there in 1980." A joke, yes, but a restless, anxious sort of joke all the same.

Woodward's unease is well founded, for if ever there were two coaches equipped to sneak a crucial advantage in the tactical mindgame, they can be located in the opposing dressing-room tomorrow. Ian McGeechan has plotted more public downfalls than Max Clifford – he was responsible for the Murrayfield ambush in 1990, he out-thought the Wallabies in 1989 and he made gorilla-sized monkeys out of the Springboks.

management during last summer's Lions tour – and while his current international role is purely advisory in nature, that

advice is more valuable than the Royal Bank of Scotland.

And then there is Jim Telfer, old granite-chops himself. Scot-

land's gloriously mordant chief coach was his usual side-splitting self yesterday as he reminded his charges of their responsibilities, telling them they were "well paid professionals" and that they could "expect to be pilloried for any failure to perform".

It was Telfer's achievement in South Africa last summer to frighten a lightweight but extremely mobile set of tight forwards into fearless, streetwise world-beaters and, if he can work the old magic on the likes of Gordon Bullock, Paul Burrell and Damian Cronin tomorrow, we will have quite a game on our hands.

Certainly, it was the potency of the McGeechan-Telfer axis that exercised the mind of the England captain yesterday.

"When we talk about the threat Scotland pose, we have to start at the top," Dallaglio

said. "That means their coaches. McGeechan is one of the most eminent tacticians in the world game and I speak from Lions experience when I say that Telfer will ensure that the Scottish pack is totally motivated. He did it for us in South Africa and he'll do it for them, no question.

The man touched with a rare footballing genius and, if he clicks with those around him, there is not a defence on earth capable of holding him for the full 90 minutes.

He can do nothing without the ball, though, and England's defensive strategy will be based squarely on the muscular ball retention exemplified by Dallaglio, Martin Johnson and Garath Archer. The Scots can't match them in that area and, possession being nine tenths of rugby law, they must fear another afternoon of intense frustration.

England's rock Johnson ready to roll again

Having flagged against the French, he was awesome against the Welsh. Will, asks Chris Hewett, Martin Johnson now hammer the Scots?

ANOTHER weekend, another almighty rumble amid the mud and bullets of professional rugby's front line. Martin Johnson has seen it, confronted it and suffered the physical consequences of sorting it rather too often of late – 40 odd games plus a Lions tour last season, another 36 or so this – and while he would continue to cut a formidable figure were he to sink to his knees in exhaustion, it is beginning to dawn on the England hierarchy that one of their prize assets is suffering from an advanced dose of the diminishing returns.

It has been an in-and-out sort of season by Johnson's stratospheric standards, his occasional flights of majesty separated by unusually long stretches of anomie. There is barely a coach alive who would not give him pride of place on his team sheet – John Hart would make an All Black of him tomorrow – but the days of a second row hitting his peak at 30 are long gone. England's kingpin lock turned 28 earlier this month and unless appearances are very deceptive, he is beginning to feel his age.

Yet Johnson will not give an inch; if his battered body is screaming messages at him, those messages are falling on deaf ears. "I've never asked to be left out of any rugby team I've ever played for and you can take it from me that I don't intend to start now," he mutters, his almost inaudible bass tone spiked with an iron determination to finish the job, to see it through to the end. "If I'm selected to play, I play. Simple as that. I've missed only one Premiership match for Leicester this season and I think that's fair enough. It's important to keep yourself as fresh as possible, obviously, but it's the same for everyone these days. Pro game, and all that."

As if to reinforce his deeply-held belief that the only person qualified to cast judgement on a player's general well-being is the player himself, Johnson proceeds to challenge the common assumption that he will pass up the opportunity to tour with his country this summer. "I did read an article to that effect, but since I'm not even close to making a decision, I fail to see how anyone can tell me what it's likely to be. It's between Clive Woodward and myself and we'll discuss it at the end of the Five Nations. As I've said, there's not much point in being a rugby player if you don't want to play rugby."

Unfortunately for the Scots, notoriously challenged in the beef and brawn

department, Johnson particularly wants to play in Edinburgh tomorrow afternoon. "It's about time we turned on a show at Murrayfield because whenever we play there, we struggle to hit top gear. I've been there twice '94 and '96, and I've yet to see us score a try. On the first occasion we threw away God knows how many chances and ended up winning with a last-minute penalty. And the second? Well, that was Dean Richards' game, wasn't it?" He smiles at the memory of his club-mate's epic contribution that day. "One way or another, Deano saw a fair bit of the ball. Why the hell did the Scots keep kicking it to him?"

But which Johnson will the Scots encounter? The flat, one-paced performance of Paris six weeks ago or the fierce, up and implacably hostile enforcer of Twickenham two weeks later? From cat to class to world class in the space of a fortnight. How does he explain that little discrepancy?

"I've never been asked to be left out of any rugby team I've ever played for and, you can take it from me, I don't intend to start now"

"It all comes down to attitude and I don't think many of the England team brought the right attitude to the French game. We let ourselves down pretty seriously that day; we considered ourselves a good side because we'd drawn with the All Blacks last time out and we assumed they were a poor side because they'd been slaughtered by the Springboks. We didn't address things in the right manner and as a result, we didn't give ourselves an earthly."

"The strange thing about France was that we were all absolutely convinced we'd got the preparation right; I'm one of the more experienced members of the side and I don't think it dawned on me that there might be something wrong until a few minutes before kick-off. I detected a little something about the atmosphere in the dressing-room that

made me uneasy and when the French scored two tries in the first 20, I realised we'd got it badly wrong.

"We soaked up some stick for that performance and rightly so. It helped us focus more strongly on the Welsh, though, and while they too went ahead early, we were in a far better frame of mind to work it out. There was no panic. After their second try, the forwards got together and said: 'Look, if we concentrate on the basics and stop giving them the bloody ball, they won't be able to live with us.' They didn't live with us, either."

Now, when, of course, all hell has broken loose on rugby's ever-vibrant political stage, the Northampton, London, Woodward's Bisham Abbey ultimate, the English Club's Charter, Fran Cotton's "Vision", Johnson shakes his head mournfully at the very mention of the latest committee room shenanigans and you get the impression that he would rather play 80 games a season, all of them against New Zealand and South Africa, than take tea with Cliff Brittle and Sir John Hall.

"The only positive aspect of the last three weeks or so is that it has brought the England squad closer together. Big off-field ructions tend to have that effect – those who were involved at the time remember how Will Carling's sacking by the Rugby Football Union gave us a feeling of great solidarity – and if we can take that togetherness on to the field, all well and good."

"We're a close-knit party anyway and Clive can take a lot of credit for that. I'm not saying we weren't close under Geoff Cooke or Jack Rowell but in the professionalism environment, the whole atmosphere has changed almost beyond recognition. Clive is full-time, of course, and he's in a much better position to make things happen, but he's also young enough to speak the players' language, to occupy the same wavelength. That's very important, it seems to me. We know exactly where we stand with him."

If a frowning, beetle-browed Johnson shuns Damian Cronin, his opposing front jumper, out of the road at the first fine-out tomorrow, wraps two great hairy mits around the ball and lays it on a silver salver for Matthew Dawson to distribute as he thinks fit, Scotland will know exactly where they stand, too. They will be somewhere between a rock and a very hard place and the view will be distinctly unpleasant.



Looking for a lift: Martin Johnson will be hoping England's beef and brawn are in fine form at Murrayfield. Photograph: Reuters

Coach Gatland warns against rare case of Irish optimism

By David Hughes
in Dublin

IRELAND expects, and all that, and therein lies the rub. Maintaining a national tradition of veering from extreme pessimism to unbridled optimism, victory over Wales is confidently expected at Lansdowne Road this afternoon after the unexpectedly strong showing in Paris. The degree to which this optimism spreads to the home dressing-room may well determine the outcome.

It may sound clichéd, but there's an element of truth in the old adage that Irish teams are happiest when underdogs. Indeed, perhaps the Lansdowne Road crowd are as well, when

one compares the frenzied atmosphere for the visit of the All Blacks to the sombre air for the game against the Scotland. After the latter encounter, the team was pilloried. Now, they're everybody's favourite team again hereabouts. Yes, fear was one of the main sources of motivation against a French side halfway towards a second successive Grand Slam. With the best will in the world, the Welsh team does not strike that same fear into anybody.

Gatland has demonstrated an acute understanding of the Irish psyche and has shown himself to be an expert motivator both with Connacht and now with Ireland. Identifying and ensuring the correct mental approach is one of the prime tasks facing Warren Gatland, the pragmatic Kiwi coach, who has brought Ireland back to basics after the more utopian ideals of Brian Ashton.

"I heard a couple of players' comments that they didn't consider the Welsh to be a big threat, and that was kicked into touch straightaway. I have reminded them that all internationals are difficult and that any side are going to be tough opposition."

By contrast, Welsh prowess rests in their back-line, even if Scott Gibbs' big hits and ability to bounce off props may be missed. Accordingly, Robert Howley has been extolling a more expansive game plan.

"We want to go out against Ireland and play the traditional handling game. Welsh rugby is famous for," he said. Hence, something similar to the more structured game plan which applied against France seems

likely. Ireland's strength is in their pack, where the set pieces have been excellent all season, and once again Connor McGuiness and Eric Elwood can be expected to test the Welsh in the air early and often, while also kicking for the corners.

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unlikely. Ireland's strength is in their pack, where the set pieces have been excellent all season, and once again Connor Mc

Guiness and Eric Elwood can be expected to test the Welsh in the air early and often, while also kicking for the corners.

Kevin Bowring, the Wales coach, is under no illusions about the task facing his side. "We are fully aware of the commitment, the passion, the intensity, that they will throw at us, especially early on in the game," he said.

"When you play against the Irish they sometimes seem to have a few more than 15 on the field, and it is usually chaos and mayhem for that opening period.

"We know it will be a very

physical challenge. They will really come at us, buoyed up by their performance against France and also disappointed that they haven't registered a win in the Five Nations yet."

Home advantage has been negligible in this fixture, with only two wins in the last 14 years. Against that, Ireland have won the last four meetings including a World Cup win in South Africa three years ago, and will be going for a record fourth successive Five Nations win over the Welsh.

About the safest prediction to make is that this is a classically 50-50 Celtic confrontation, and the biggest surprise will be if there's more than a score in it at the end.

IRELAND v WALES

C. Clarke	London Wasps	12	London Wasps	13	K. Morgan	Cardiff
R. Wallace	Saracens	14	W. Brookes	14	W. Brookes	Cardiff
J. Henderson	Wasps	13	A. Beetson	11	J. Thomas	Cardiff
K. Mogg	London Wasps	12	L. Davies	11	N. Jenkins	Cardiff
D. Micah	St. Mary's	11	G. Thomas	10	R. Howley	Cardiff, capt.
E. Flannery	Cardiganians	10	N. Jenkins	9	A. Lewis	Cardiff
C. M. McGuinness	St. Mary's	9	R. Howley	8	G. Jenkins	Swansea
R. Corrigan	Graysones	1	A. Lewis	7	D. Young	Cardiff
J. Wood	Leicester City	2	G. Jenkins	6	M. Moore	Swansea
P. Wallace	Saracens	3	D. Young	5	R. Appleby	Swansea
P. John	Saracens	4	M. Voyle	4	A. Jones	Swansea
M. O'Kelly	London Irish	5	A. Moore	3	R. Appleby	Swansea
D. Corkery	Bristol	6	R. Appleby	2	J. Jones	Swansea
A. Ward	Ballymena	7	C. Charvis	1	J. Jones	Swansea
V. Costello	St. Mary's	8	C. Charvis	0	C. Charvis	Swansea
R. Stooke	London Wasps	9	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hines	London Wasps	10	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hines	London Wasps	11	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	12	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	13	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	14	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	15	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	16	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	17	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	18	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	19	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	20	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	21	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	22	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	23	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	24	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	25	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	26	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	27	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	28	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	29	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	30	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	31	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea
D. Hayward	London Wasps	32	M. Jones	0	M. Jones	Swansea



SPORT

Saturday 21 March 1998 ■

Sixth Test: Rain gives Atherton and Stewart respite from ferocious opening spell by Walsh and Ambrose on another poor surface

England ambition limited to survival

By Derek Pringle
in St John's, Antigua

England 25-0 v West Indies

ENGLAND'S chances of levelling the series developed into a race against time at the new look Recreation Ground yesterday. Put in to bat on a damp pitch, improving gradually as it dried, England were 25 without loss by lunch on a day which was constantly interrupted by heavy showers.

If the achievement sounds modest, it was in fact a triumph of major proportions, as batting, just as it had done in Jamaica eight weeks previously, started off as little more than a lottery against the might of the West Indies' new ball attack.

In 1736, the same area was used for public executions following a slave rebellion led by Prince Klaas, who was himself broken on the wheel. But if that was a particularly gruesome method, which involved the systematic breaking of every major bone, it was one England's batsmen, repeatedly bruised and battered by rogue deliveries, would no doubt have felt

empathy with 262 years later. Only persistent showers ensured the damage to body and spirit was not greater.

After one such shower had delayed the start, it was the first ball, bowled by Courtney Walsh to the England captain, which first indicated what might lie in store for those wielding the willow. It was only a loosener, but the hardness of the ball meant that the damp surface of the pitch was pushed up as if it were Plasticine, and the ball reared over Atherton's head. The next ball, fuller, also gripped and pushed up the top, but the batsman was able to smother it.

The two untesting balls, both played to gully, were then followed by one every bit as lethal as those that had rained down during the brief session of the First Test at Sabina Park, which was abandoned well before lunch. Kicking viciously from just short of a length, it struck Atherton on the left wrist as he tried to prevent it hitting him.

As it had done in Jamaica, the blow heralded the arrival of Wayne Morten, the team physiotherapist, to dispense more comfort and cold spray. He was

also kept the ball well up,

greeted by another shower, delayed completion of the opening over by another hour.

Morten was in action again

after the restart, this time tending to Alec Stewart after the

Surrey man was struck in the

solitary pleasure by a wicked lifter from Curtly Ambrose. It was a nasty

blow and Stewart, who had earlier gloved a throat ball from the fast bowler to the fine leg boundary, lay prone at the crease for several minutes.

Somehow, the pair negotiated their way to lunch, despite a couple of missed chances – Atherton when he edged Walsh between Brian Lara and the wicketkeeper, Junior Murray, and Stewart when he squinted Ambrose low to Shivnarine Chanderpaul's left at gully.

For a while runs off legitimate strokes appeared to be a

fourth component to a game of

body blows and crabbed defensive strokes. Perhaps mindful of the embarrassing events

in his homeland, Walsh a proud

Jamaican never changed gear,

although that may have had

more to do with the wet run-ups

than any charitable thoughts.

He also kept the ball well up,

meeting that the pitch com-

mittee would include repre-

sentatives of the Jamaica board

and the West Indies Cricket

Board. Umpires ruled that the

wicket used for the abandoned

Test was dangerous and unfit.

The abandonment was a

first in the 121-year history of

Test cricket. England, having

won the toss, had opted to bat

first. They had reached 17 for

three wickets and several of the

batsmen had been hit on the

gloves and body by fast, rising

deliveries, when the game was

called off.

Jackie Hendriks, the presi-

dent of the board, promised that

he and his executive would do

all in their power to have Sabina

Park ready to host a Test match

against the touring Australians

next year.

He added that Jamaica had

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publicity due to the test pitch.

Hendriks said that the

Kingston Cricket Club, which

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Errol Ziadie, president of

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Under fire: Alec Stewart winces after being struck in the chest yesterday

Photograph: David Ashdown

Jamaica cricket board survives pitch farce

THE executive of the Jamaica Cricket Board has been given a vote of confidence, despite tendering their resignations after the abandoned first Test between England and the West Indies.

The Test at Jamaica's Sabina Park was abandoned on 29 January after just 10 overs because of the condition of the wicket. All but two members of the board, who were summoned to an emergency meeting on Thursday, voted to reject offers of resignation from the committee.

Jackie Hendriks, the president of the board, promised that he and his executive would do all in their power to have Sabina Park ready to host a Test match against the touring Australians next year.

He added that Jamaica had already received a lot of bad publicity due to the test pitch.

Hendriks said that the Kingston Cricket Club, which owns the Sabina Park grounds, had now formed a committee to oversee future preparation.

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YOUR MONEY

Personal finance and property

Saturday 21 March 1998

Budget bonanza for savers

The Chancellor has paved the way for investors and providers to keep their savings safe from the taxman. **Nic Cicutti** reports

There is nothing quite as pleasurable – and astonishing – as watching a minister admit to a large audience that his Government got it wrong all along.

Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, performed this trick in his Budget speech in the Commons on Tuesday. The moment came when he announced that the Treasury was backtracking from plans to punish PEP investors by capping at £50,000 the amount they could transfer into new-style Individual Savings Accounts (ISA).

Indeed, the Chancellor went further. All funds invested in PEPs between 1987 and April 1999 will be allowed to stay as they are and will continue to enjoy their existing tax-free status. This means that up to £82,000 so far sheltered in PEPs plus any gains in the course of the past 10 years, will remain out of the hands of the Inland Revenue.

As for ISAs, although there will be a £5,000 annual limit, the proposed £50,000 lifetime cap on investments into them has also been lifted. Perhaps worried at potential suggestions of a total climbdown, the Chancellor said the £5,000 annual limit will stay in place for 10 years, with a "review" after seven years.

As if that were not enough, Mr Brown also amended his department's original plan, so that in the first year up to £7,000 can be invested in an ISA, of which up to £3,000 may be in cash. This is likely to increase the likelihood of lower wage-earners being prepared to save money.

As one upper-class "expert",

who preferred to remain anonymous, explains: "Joe Sippack is hardly likely to stash his lolly in an ISA if it means dealing in weird things like shares. But give him the nearest thing to an instant access building society account and he might take it up. Who knows, he might even get the investment bug." Research from the United States suggests that many small investors start with cash plans and move into equities later.

The improvements to the original ISA proposals extend to allowing investors to choose different managers for their cash, equity investments and insurance products, instead of being forced to find one ISA provider.

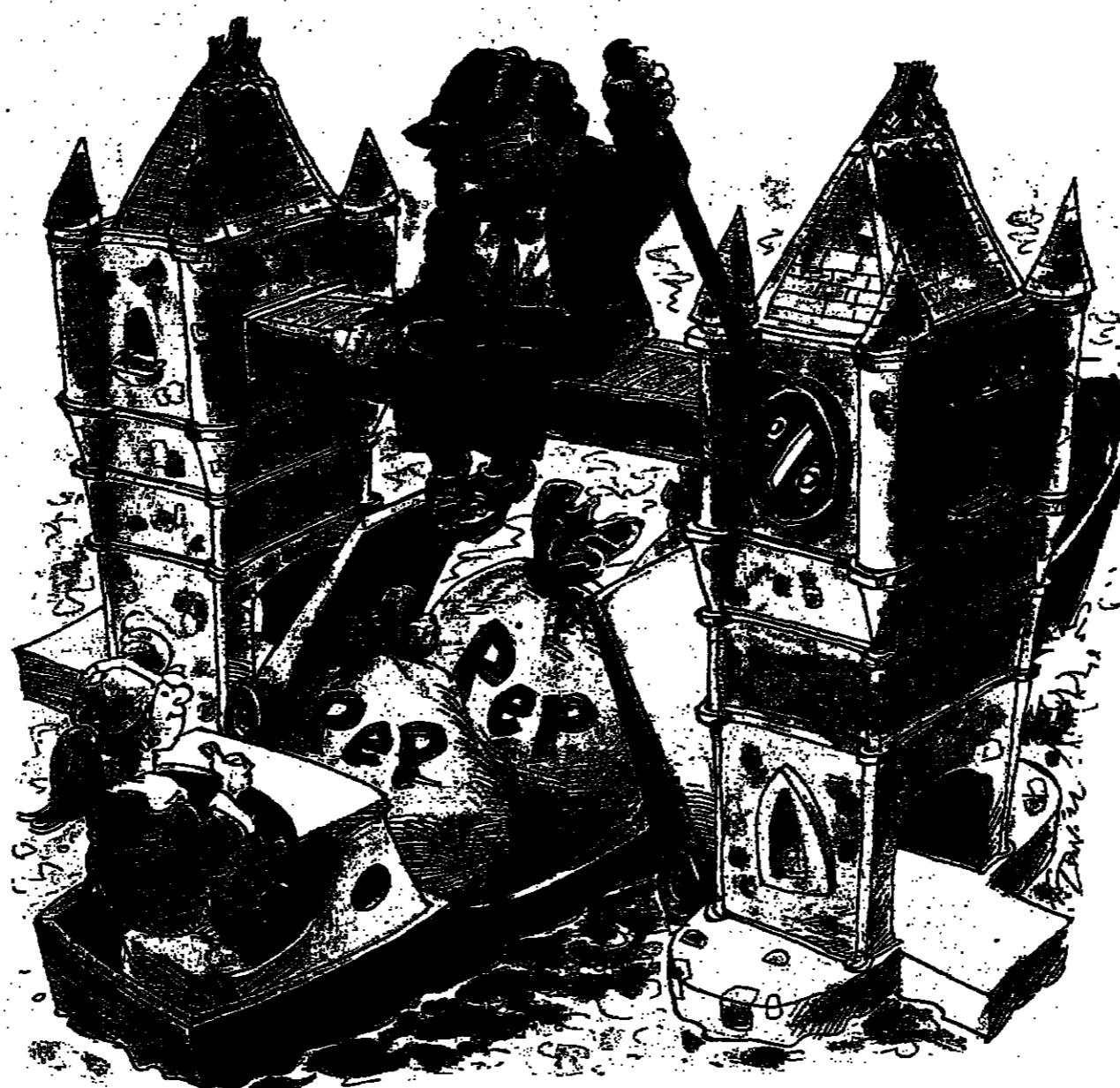
Not surprisingly, the financial services industry is fulsome in its praise for the Chancellor: "The fact that [he] has ring-fenced existing PEP savings is good news for the 3.2 million people who, according to our research, use PEPs to fund retirement or repay a mortgage," says Templeton's marketing manager, Jim Sharp.

Richard Branson, airline tycoon and chairman of Virgin Direct, a telephone PEP provider, praises the Government for having "kept its promise" to listen to PEP providers.

The outpourings of congratulations were no doubt totally unconnected with the fact that PEP providers now expect a last-minute rush in sales. By 5 April, according to Royal & Sun Alliance, up to £70m may flow into PEPs from individuals who held off because of the uncertainty over their future.

In the next 12 months to April 1999, many billions more are likely to be placed in both PEPs and their less sexy partners, ISAs, as investors make use of their tax-saving benefits.

As it happens, the advice from many experts is to do precisely that. Amanda Davidson, partner at London-based financial advisers Holden Mehan, says: "Saving is important for everyone and if there is a chance to lock up some capital gains and avoid income tax on an investment for an indefinite period, it makes sense to take it."



Indeed, Keith Luckhoo, sales manager at Royal & Sun Alliance Unit Trusts, argues that PEPs and ISAs may become an even more essential part of tax planning now that changes to capital gains tax (CGT) rules are set to come in.

The changes mean that inheritance relief – allowing a element of inflation to be added when calculating gains that may be liable to CGT – will be scrapped. CGT will be tapered, starting at 40 per cent in the first year and reducing to 24 per cent (13.8 per cent for lower-rate taxpayers) after 10 years.

However, Mr Luckhoo says: "If inflation averaged only 3 per cent a year over 10 years, the first 34 per cent of gains would have been tax free. Now this element of gains will be taxable, subject only to tapering relief."

Shares bought and sold in a unit or investment trust PEP and future ISA are not deemed to be "crystallised" for CGT purposes, making collective investments more tax-advantageous than buying individual shares.

All in all, the Iron Chancellor's about-turn is positive news for all savers. As always, wealthier savers will do far better than the rest. But at least Mr Brown

has abandoned the Treasury's spurious argument that penalising mildly better-off savers by taking some of their tax benefits away would somehow benefit the lower-paid. That was never true and Labour's recognition of the fact is a step forward.

For more details on PEPs, see our survey on pages 7 to 10.

Relief for homeowners as Miras wins a reprieve – but stamp duty goes up instead

Housing experts expressed surprise and mortgage lenders gave huge sighs of relief this week, as the Government revealed that a widely-expected further cut in home loan tax relief would not be imposed after all.

True, the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, did take another bite out of more affluent buyers, by increasing stamp duty on property purchases from 1.5 per cent on the entire amount of purchases over £250,000. Duty on property purchases over £500,000 will rise from 2 to 3 per cent.

On the mortgage interest relief (Miras) front, lenders said they were delighted at the no-change decision, which leaves relief in place at 10 per cent from 5 April, down from 15 per cent in the present tax year. Most experts had predicted a further cut to 5 per cent in April 1999, if not its outright abolition. Each 5 per cent reduction adds £10 a month to the cost of home loans over £30,000.

Chris French, chief executive at Kensington Mortgage Company, a home loan

broker, says: "We're delighted the Chancellor has made no change to Miras and no significant changes to stamp duty."

The housing market is still reasonably fragile and with the threat of higher interest rates still strong, it is important that the cost of borrowing is not increased significantly."

In fact, had Mr Brown lived up to the market's widespread expectations, most analysts believe it would have had relatively little effect on house prices. Ciara Barr, chief UK economist at Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, said earlier this week that his company predicts a rise in property prices of about 8 per cent this year.

Indeed, some building societies, including Skipton, are arguing that the £3bn annual cost of Miras is misdirected. They would have been relatively happy to have seen it scrapped altogether, as long as significant resources were used to help more vulnerable groups, including first-time buyers.

Mr Brown's measure on stamp duty

is expected to yield £390m in the coming tax year, rising to £520m in 2000/01. Of that, 25 per cent will come from some 30,000 transactions in the residential property market. That, however, depends on how house prices proceed in the next few years, particularly in London and the South-east.

As with the earlier stamp duty hike in July, the Chancellor offered scant opportunities to buyers hoping to squeeze their purchases through before the revenue-raising measures come into force. They will apply to all purchases taking place on or after next Tuesday, except for those made where an exchange of contract had already taken place before last Tuesday.

In other ways, the Chancellor may have prolonged the agony of homebuyers. The City's reaction to the Budget was to drive up sterling against other foreign currencies. This in turn increases the potential for a further increase in interest rates.

– Nic Cicutti

Bad news in the Red Book for travellers

Not all of the Chancellor's U-turns this week meant good news for punters.

Apart from the by-now obligatory sting performed on fags and booze, travellers will be forced to pay a far higher rate of Insurance Premium Tax (IPT) on the cover they buy when they go abroad.

The higher rates follow a decision by Gordon Brown to back away from the previous Government's decision to levy a higher amount of Insurance Premium Tax (IPT) on travel cover sold through estate agents than other outlets.

The Chancellor's move means an earlier system of dual pricing, whereby estate agents were forced to charge IPT at 17.5 per cent on cover they sold while other insurers could levy just 4 per cent on their policies, will be scrapped. Instead, every outlet will have to charge 17.5 per cent.

The increase could mean that typical annual travel cover for a family with two children will rise by about £10 to £13.

The British Insurance & Investment Brokers Association (Biba), the brokers'

trade body, warns that Mr Brown's decision is bad news for travellers.

The Conservatives' original decision to tax travel agents at a higher rate came after mounting evidence that many were selling expensive insurance as a condition of the supposedly cheap travel deals.

The Department of Trade and Industry is set to ban this practice, while attempts to circumvent the tax by offering "free" cover as part of a travel package will incur IPT at the same 17.5 per cent rate.

However, Mike Williams, chief executive at Biba, points out: "The Chancellor's move represents a U-turn. This demonstrates that the Government has succumbed to strong lobbying by the travel industry at the expense of the public." The measure is expected to raise just £20m a year for the Government by the year 2000.

The cost to individuals who fail to take out cover because it seemed too expensive, and then find an accident or theft leaves them facing hardship, is not yet known.

– Nic Cicutti

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A Treasury of Budget information

Gordon Brown's first full Budget will have left many people slightly bemused about what is and what is not actually going to happen next month at the start of the new tax year. He has slipped into the habit of "pre-announcing" measures.

Many of the tax changes unveiled last Tuesday will not come into effect until April next year. If you want to know not only what the Chancellor said but what sums the Government's been doing and using to back up his plans, it is worth checking out the Treasury web site.

Not only will you find a verbatim transcript of the Budget Speech, you can download copies of the Budget, *Red Book News*, *Ambitions for Britain* and other documents, including *Innovating for the future: investing in R&D and The Code for Fiscal Stability*.

In addition, you can download copies of the press releases which accompany the Budget. This is the fat pile of paper which journalists, accountants and city analysts burn the midnight oil over on Budget day and for several days thereafter. It is usually these documents into which the Treasury slips a few little Budget booby traps for the unwary taxpayer.

If this all sounds too turgid you could settle for downloading or merely ordering your own copy of the *Pocket Budget*, which contains the Government's description of the Budget measures.

The site also allows the democratically inclined to check on previous Budgets and related legislation. You can look back not only at the summer 1997 mini-Budget, Gordon Brown's first, but also at Ken Clarke's Budgets.

However, the burning question is are you better off or worse off as a result? You can check what kind of tax bill you are likely to face under the Budget proposals with Moneyworld's on-line personal tax calculator. Developed in conjunction with accountants

Price Waterhouse, it is designed for the UK tax system and assumes you are a UK resident. The calculator allows you to work out your approximate tax bill. Before you panic about entering personal details on to the web, Moneyworld and Price Waterhouse do not ask for your name or address and promise not to record, use or pass on any of the information you input.

The calculator can take account of whether you are employed or self-employed. It includes provision for dividends and savings account interest, the rent-a-room scheme, personal allowances, etc.

Price Waterhouse also has a detailed Budget Report on-line. The firm's planned merger partners, Coopers & Lybrand, also offers a comprehensive site, as does Deloitte & Touche - full marks to the latter for being fastest out of the starting gate to register "budget98" as a website address.

And a final thought this week on the subject of internet addresses. The Institute of Trade Mark Managers has issued a warning about organisations selling domain names with the suffix ".tm" instead of better known suffixes such as ".com" or ".co.uk".

Domain names are the addresses which identify computers linked to the internet. This ".tm" does not mean "trade mark". As a business you should not fall into this trap, and, as an individual, you should be wary of any well-known company name with this suffix - all it actually means is that the website in question is identifying itself as being on a computer located in Turkmenistan.

Treasury: www.hm-treasury.gov.uk
Moneyworld Tax Calculator: www.moneyworld.co.uk/budget98
Price Waterhouse: www.pw.com
Coopers & Lybrand: www.uk.coopers.com
Deloitte & Touche: www.budget98.com

Watch out for costly imitations

Collect to invest: Forget tasteful tiaras. The really rich go for the kitsch. By John Windsor

Naff, naff, naff! Little bunnies, dicky-birds and pussy cats. Would you be seen wearing any of this sentimental jewellery? Would any woman?

Do not scoff. If you turn up your nose, the joke could be on you.

They are gold, set with rubies, emeralds and diamonds, and are signed by big names such as Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels and Tiffany. Don't you know a sapphire when you see one?

A private collection of 70 novelty brooches and earrings, mostly from the Fifties and Sixties, has estimates mainly in the £2,000-£5,000 range (including multiple lots) at Christie's on Wednesday (11am).

The collection has attracted dozens of telephone inquiries from people who will be bidding £30,000 or so for big parures (suites of matching jewellery) in the same sale.

The rich, you might think, have unusual taste. Like, none at all. But there are subtler ways of flaunting wealth than toting big rocks. These are for casual, day wear, at tea parties, coffee mornings and on the grouse moors, during the hours before the tiaras come out.

Their humorous kitschiness makes a statement of serious wealth.

To those in the know, they are an joke - although it is difficult to understand how anybody could avoid grimacing at a pair of Sixties coral and

emerald duck brooches with over-stylised, Disney-like features, by Van Cleef & Arpels. They are estimated £3,000-£5,000.

For rich, romantic sailors, such expensive trifles provide a way of giving a girl some best friends in an atmosphere of light-hearted frivolity. The little red box containing the plain diamond engagement ring comes later.

So beware those cute, gem-set Easter bunnies: they could be a tender trap. As a gift from husband to wife, they sidestep the risk of buying jewellery that is not to her taste.

Those who cannot afford real jewellery are the most likely to snare at such gem-set trifles and associate it with £2-a-time costume jewellery pinned to cards.

But, for those who know jewellery and its history, they have different associations: as far back as the Renaissance, jewellers fashioned animal conceits around big pearls whose shapes suggested a leopard's head, or perhaps a sea-sprite. In the 18th century, birds of rose-cut diamonds holding garlands were all the rage and are now period pieces.

Napoleon took the bumble bee as his imperial symbol and the jeweller Boucheron made whole hives of them, set with diamonds and precious stones.

Jewellery connoisseurs who doubt the genuineness of gem-set brooches would not associate them first of all with cut-price stores, but rather with Butler & Wilson, glamorous makers of costume jewellery in glamorous South Molton Street, west London.

The firm makes novelty jewellery to a high standard of craftsmanship and sells for under £50 brooches resembling those in Christie's sale. The late Diana, Princess of Wales used to visit the shop. She wore her paste pearls and a black snake brooch. A doubletake, that. Princesses are expected to wear the real thing.

Well, could you tell Butler & Wilson's black crystal sausage dog or diamante pussy cat - both brooches priced £38 - from the real thing? The obvious clue is that they are completely encrusted with sparklers, not just a modest four or five. The real thing would be far too expensive for novelty.

Novelty brooches with genuine gems are holding their value at auction. In fact, there is sometimes fierce competition among bidders to buy particular cute animals that they have got a crush on. Three emerald and diamond lions by Van Cleef & Arpels are estimated £5,000-£7,000 the lot in the sale, but identical ones have sold individually for as much as £6,000.

To decide whether such pieces are

Pussy cat, pussy cat can you tell which one is £38 from Butler & Wilson and which is several thousand pounds from Van Cleef & Arpels? (The one below is the more affordable version)

Fifties skiing bird brooch, lotted with four others at an estimated £2,500-£3,500, though unsigned, will rise in value as other ski memorabilia rises.

In the same collection are Victorian brooches that are more naturalistic, less stylised - such as a demantoid, garnet, diamond and ruby bird brooch of about 1890, estimated £2,000-£3,000.

A guide to antique pieces, "Sentimental Jewellery", by Ann Louise Luthi, has just been issued by Shire Publications (£3.95 plus £1 p&p). If you buy at the sale, buy for love. It would be a pity to hide novelty jewellery in the safe, just because you hate the sight of it.

Christie's, 8 King Street, London SW1 (0171-839 9050). Butler & Wilson, 20 South Molton Street, London W1 (0171-409 2955). Shire Publications, Cromwell House, Church Street, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire HP27 9AA (01844 344301).

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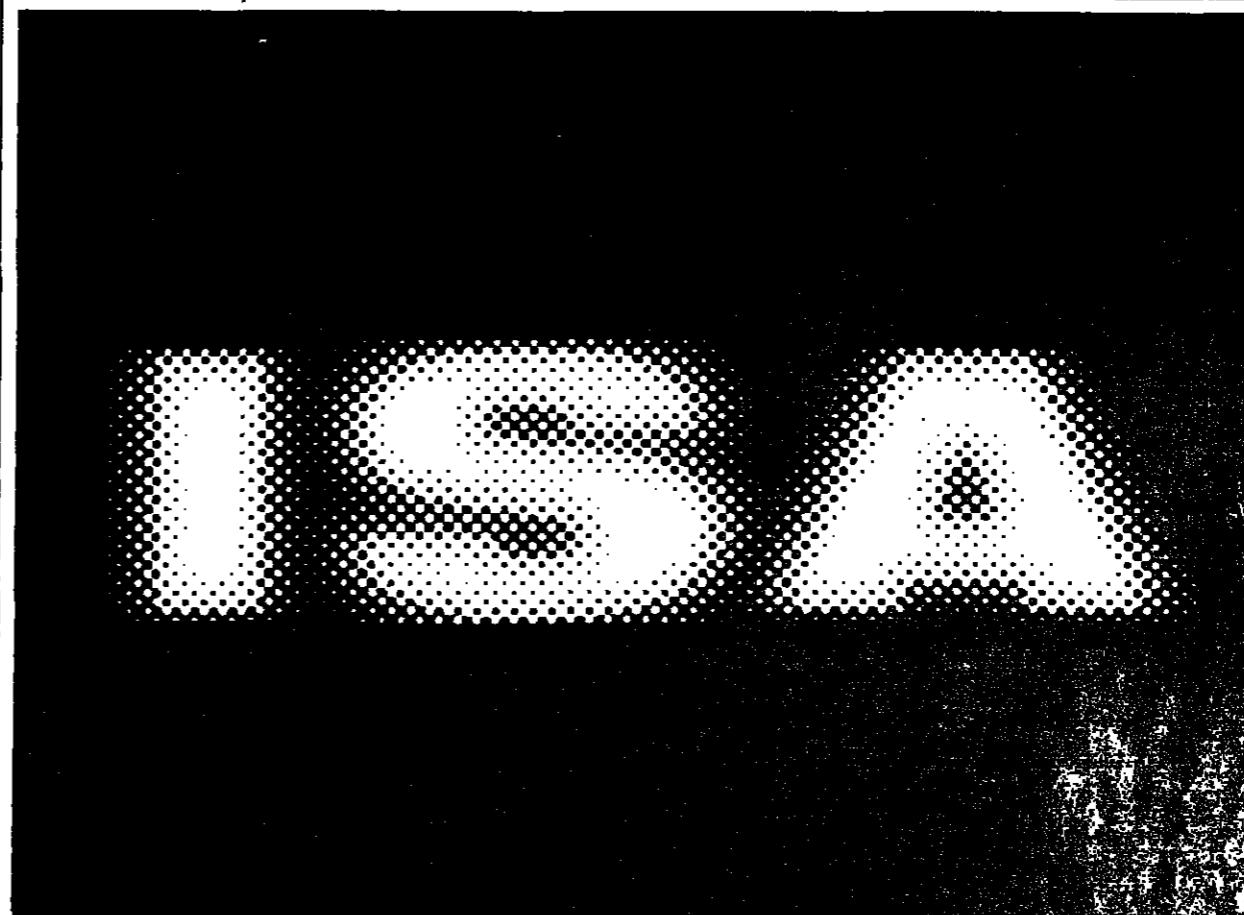
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Telephone	% Rate and period	Max. fee	Interest
MORTGAGES			
West Bromwich BS	0121 525 7070	3.95% to 30.4.00	7.5%
Prudential BS	0800 000008	5.55% to 31.01	7.5%
Northern Rock	0845 605 0500	6.25% to 14.03	2.25%
			No MP for adv up to 8.5%
VARIED UNSECURED RATES			
Barclays BS	0899 133149	0.10% for 1 year	0%
Prudential BS	0800 000008	4.85% to 31.00	2.25%
Northern Rock	0845 605 0500	8.00% to 14.01	2.25%
			£500 rebate, related rate
FIRST TIME BUYERS FIXED RATES			
Northern Rock	0845 605 0500	4.495% to 14.01	0%
Barclays BS	01922 322000	5.75% to 15.01	0%
Scarborough BS	0899 133149	6.14% for 5 years	0%
			£500 rebate, related rate
FIRST TIME BUYERS VARIABLE DISCOUNTED RATES			
Woolwich	0845 737575	5.70% for 1 year	0%
Prudential BS	0800 000008	5.55% to 31.01	2.25%
Northern Rock	0845 605 0500	8.00% for 5 years	2.25%
			Refund of cash fee
UNSECURED PERSONAL LOANS			
Telephone	APR 15	Fixed monthly payments on £500 over 3 yrs	
UNSECURED			
		With Insurance	Without Insurance
Northern Rock	0845 421421	9.9% H	£185.13
Yorkshire	0800 232122	12.5%	£198.33
Direct Line	0161 693 9863	12.8% A	£183.75
			£165.38
SECURED LOANS (SECOND CHARGE)			
Telephone	APR	Max LTV Advance	Term
Chelmsford Bank	0800 240024	8.7%	Heg £2K to £15K
Royal Bank of Scotland	0800 121121	10.7%	£2.5K to £10K
Post Direct	0345 100103	11.2%	£5K to Heg
			3 years to 25 years
			Up to 40 years
OVERDRAFTS			
Telephone	Account	5 pm	APR
		Authorised	Unauthorised
Alliance & Leicester	0800 959585	0.95%	12.00% to 2.50%
Bank of Scotland Direct	0800 048498	-	11.0%
Northern Rock	0800 302010	0.97%	12.2% to 2.10%
			28.2%
CREDIT CARDS			
Telephone	Card Type	Rate %	APR
		5% p.a.	Fee period interest
Capital One Bank	0800 659000	Visa	0.565% to 6.50%
FBS Adverts	0800 077770	Visa	0.545% to 5.50%
Co-operative Bank	0800 100000	Advantage Visa	0.595% to 6.50%
			0 days
GOLD CARDS			
Capital One Bank	0800 659000	Visa	0.565% to 6.50%
Co-operative Bank	0845 212121	Base Rate Visa	0.005% to 1.10%
FBS Adverts	0800 077770	Visa	0.045% to 7.00%
			54 days 220K
STORE CARDS			
Telephone		Payment by direct debit	Payment by other methods
		% PM	% APR
John Lewis	Via store	1.35%	18.0%
	Via store	1.35%	26.0%
Marks & Spencer	01244 616161	1.97%	26.5%
			2.07% 27.2%

BEST SAVINGS RATES

Telephone number	Account	Notice or term	Deposit %	Interest %
INSTANT ACCESS				
Chelmsford Bank	0800 442265	Simple	£1	6.75%
Strong & Sibyline BS	0345 412653	Branch instant	£100	6.00%
Northern Rock	0800 505000	Branch Selected instant	£1,000	6.00%
Lads & Hollies BS	0500 255777	Premier Access	£5,000	7.00%
INSTANT ACCESS POSTAL ACCOUNTS				
Standard Life Bank	0345 605657	Direct Access	Instant (1)	£1 6.95%
Scottish Widows Bank	0845 845 0623	Instant Access	Instant (2)	£100 7.00%
Saffway	0800 852005	Direct Savings	Instant (3)	£1,000 7.00%
Northern Rock	0845 800 6767	Save Direct instant	Instant (4)	£5,000 7.00%
NOTICE ACCOUNTS & BONDS				
Scarborough BS	01723 500616	Scarborough 30	30 Day	£1,000 7.00%
Bristol & West	0800 222121	Postal 30	30 Day (2)	£1,000 7.00%
Leeds & General BS	0500 111200	60 Direct 4	60 Day (3)	£1,000 8.00%
Investor Bank (UK)	0171 268 1650	Base Plus	1 Year	£2,001 6.00%
CHEQUE ACCOUNTS				
Scarborough BS	01723 500616	Scarborough 30	6 Month	£5,000 7.55%
Bristol & West	0800 222121	Postal 30	6 Month	£5,000 7.55%
Sheffield BS	01904 503322	Postal 30	10.08	£1,000 7.00%
Prudential Bank	0800 373191	Postal 30	2 Year	£2,000 7.25%
FIRST TESSAS				
Nottingham & Peterborough	01723 372222	Postal TESSA	5 Year	£100 6.00%
Bradford & Bingley BS	0800 852265	Preference TESSA	5 Year	£200 6.00%
Britannia BS	0800 132004	TESSA 2 Flex	5 Year	£200 6.00%
Nottingham & Peterborough	01723 372222	TESSA 2 Flex	5 Year	£200 6.00%
Brussels BS	0800 320632	Postal TESSA	5 Year	£3,001 6.00%
FOLLOW-ON TESSAS				
Bradford & Bingley BS	0800 852265	Preference TESSA	1 Year	£10,000 6.25%
Sun Banking Club	0143 744505	TESSA 2 Flex	2 Year	£10,000 6.00%
Nottingham & Peterborough	01723 372222	TESSA 2 Flex	3 Year	£10,000 6.00%
Brussels BS	0800 320632	Postal TESSA	4 Year	£10,000 6.00%
			5 Year	£10,000 5.50%
NATIONAL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (gross)				
INVESTMENT INCOME BONDS (net)				
Investment Account			1 Month	£20 4.75% Mar
			£50	5.25% Mar
			£2,500	5.50% Mar
			£5,000	5.75% Mar
			£10,000	6.00% Mar
			£22,000	6.25% Mar
			£50,000	6.50% Mar
			£100,000	6.75% Mar
			60 Day	£10,000 7.00%
			60 Day Notice	£10,000 7.00%
			60 Day	£20,000 7.00%
OFFSHORE ACCOUNTS (gross)				
Northern Rock Grem	01461 716121	Interest Protection	Interest	£10,000 7.00%
Northern Rock Grem	01461 716121	Interest 80	60 Day	£10,000 7.00%
Southern National	01241 681100	60 Day Notice	60 Day	£10,000 7.00%
Birmingham Mids	0141 700000	Interest 80	60 Day	£10,000 6.00%
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Lessons from the Sage of Omaha



THE JONATHAN DAVIS COLUMN

Mid-March brings with it many old favourites among them, the first signs of spring, the Chel-

tenham race meeting, the Budget (after a short interlude when it was moved to the autumn) and – for investment groups such as myself – the arrival of the "Sage of Omaha's" annual report to shareholders.

When I made my first visit to the annual meeting of Buffett's holding company, Berkshire Hathaway, in 1991, the number of those who turned up could still be counted in their hundreds. The meeting, at which Buffett and his lifelong business partner Charlie Munger sit and talk about the business of investment for hours on end, was still small enough to be held in the local theatre in Omaha, Nebraska, Buffett's home town.

Now, however, as his fame has spread, the attendance has grown exponentially: last year,

the turnout had grown to 7,500. Such is his fame that no stock market anywhere in the world is immune from the impact of what he has to say.

Last Monday, Buffett released his latest annual report and accounts for the year just gone. It showed another year of progress, with the company's book value up 34 per cent on the year – not bad in isolation, but "no great triumph", according to Buffett, in a year when the market overall was up 33 per cent.

Having been reported as warning last year that share prices were looking very fully valued, his comment this year that the current level of Wall Street prices could still be justified in valuation terms was enough to spark another round of buying around the world.

All this despite the fact that, by his own admission, Buffett's actions betray a real concern about the riskiness of many stock prices at today's levels.

Buffett's views are as follows. While he professes to having no views about which the market is going to move tomorrow, he does, "try in a very tough way to value it". A year ago, he said that, with the Dow Jones at its then level of 7,070 and the long bond rate at 6.89 per cent, the market did not look overvalued – conditions continued to be met.

One was that interest rates at the long end of the scale did not rise; and the second was that American companies continued to earn the "remarkable returns on equity" that they have been achieving in the last few years.

So far, says Buffett, both conditions have held: returns on equity have remained "exceptionally high", the market has bounded on to new records, while interest rates have fallen further, with the long bond rate occasionally dropping below 6 per cent. Buffett himself confirmed the reports which emerged in the autumn that he had been putting money into government bonds, a ploy which can only pay off if interest rates continue to fall. (In the event, as the annual report discloses, the profit on the bonds has been around \$600m on an investment of around \$4.0bn).

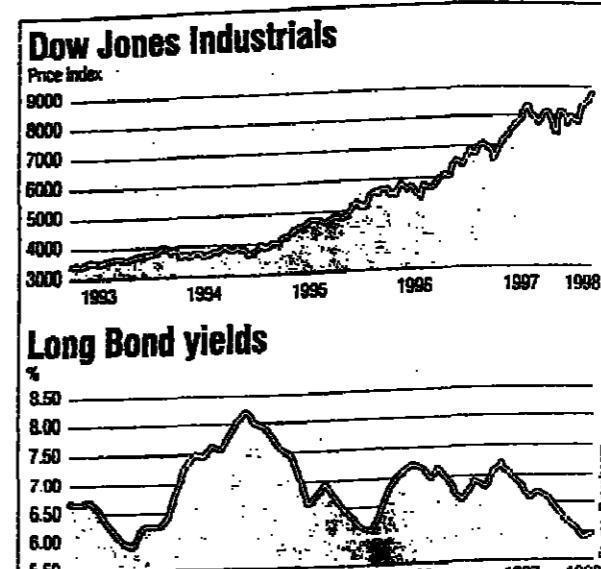
The trouble is, says Buffett, that finding good value shares in the current climate is difficult even if you make the assumption that his two conditions

will continue to hold for a little while longer.

The upshot is that while it may be still be right to buy new shares at today's levels, the height the market has reached has materially eroded the margin of safety that Ben Graham (Buffett's original mentor) identified as the "cornerstone of intelligent investing".

By his own admission, Buffett has been putting a bigger chunk of his money into bonds and what he calls "unconventional commitments". Thus, he has money tied up in forward contracts for oil, and has also been building a position in silver (profit at year-end: \$97.4m).

"We are not pleased with our prospects for committing incoming funds," Buffett writes. "It may be some time before we



ing Coca-Cola 10 years ago, everyone at the time said he had clearly run out of new ideas. His shareholding has since risen more than tenfold to \$13.3bn – so much so that Coke alone now accounts for 37 per cent of the world's most successful stock market investor's portfolio.

UNDERSTANDING THE STOCK MARKET: JOHN ANDREW

How to avoid depression after a crash

What goes up can come down again. Shares are no exception.



Historic plunge: Wall Street fell 13.2 per cent on 29 October 1929 Hulton Getty

It may seem odd, at a time when share prices are roaring ahead, to write about the opposite side of the coin. It is a word stock market investors do not like to hear – crash. However, we have to face reality.

Even though they may be reaching record highs here in London, the price of shares do plummet from time to time – as Far Eastern markets have amply demonstrated. It is not a pleasant experience to see your capital evaporate into thin air but there is not a great deal one can do about it. The golden rule is not to panic.

Ask anyone to name two stock market crashes and inevitably they will respond, "Wall Street 1929; Black Monday 1987". These are certainly the best-known cases when shares "fell out of bed". However, they are by no means the only or the first two cases. Inevitably, in the future there will be further upsets.

England's first stock market crash was in 1720 when the South Sea Company went bust. In 1745, a fall in share prices was triggered when the Jacobite forces of the Young Pretender reached Derby. Now forgotten is the run on the London bank Pole & Company in 1825, resulting in a financial crisis of such proportions that it was said England was only a day away from a barter economy. Then last year, all the world's stock markets took a tumble when markets in the Far East crashed.

Contrary to legend, the Wall Street Crash of 1929 did not result in stockbrokers throwing themselves from Manhattan's

skyscrapers. However, Wall Street did fall by 13.2 per cent on 29 October 1929 and the Great Depression started. An even greater fall was experienced on 19 October 1987, more commonly referred to as Black Monday. Shares fell on Wall Street by 25 per cent. In London, prices fell by 10.6 per cent, cutting more than £50bn from the value of shares. The following day prices fell a further 12 per cent. By 9 November, the London market had fallen 32 per cent.

Statistics, of course, do not tell us how badly private investors were hurt. As the crash came at a period when the government was encouraging wider share ownership, many investors who had purchased shares relatively recently did lose large sums. So, too, did speculators in penny shares.

The speed of the crash resulted in everyone being taken by surprise. Phone lines to brokers quickly became jammed and it was virtually impossible to sell shares on the first day and very difficult on the second. Those who were successful in getting through had

to wait weeks for the proceeds, for brokers could just not cope with the administrative burden.

Investors in unit trusts fared no better. Some management groups temporarily suspended dealing while others, allegedly, did not answer their telephones. Unit holders who did manage to sell discovered that they did so at the "cancellation price", which is the lowest price allowed by the regulators for the repurchase of units.

Unlike the 1929 crash, investors did not have to wait a long time to see the market recover. Indeed, 21 months later the Footsie was back to its pre 19 October 1987 position. Although the market ended the year higher than when it began, this was not comforting for many investors.

Anyone who bought shares at the top of the market in July 1987 had to wait five years before the prices of their shares substantially rose above the price at which they were acquired. So, what can we learn from all this?

The golden rule is only invest "capital" in shares. In

other words, you must have a reasonable level of savings before you even think about the stock market.

■ Ideally the equivalent of three months' income should be kept in an instant access savings account. Additional "comfort" funds should be kept in a notice account for emergencies. Certainly, do not place money you are saving for a future planned expenditure into shares.

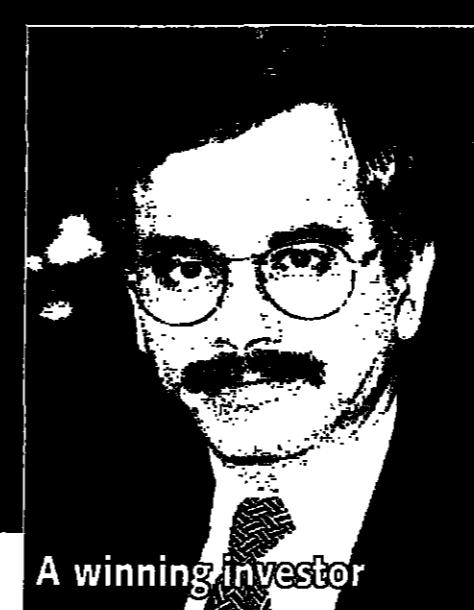
■ Shares are not for everyone. If fluctuations in share prices are likely to cause you sleepless nights, then think about "safe" investments such as interest bearing accounts or "guaranteed" investments that pay a bonus at the end of five years if the stock market does well and returns your money in full if it does not.

■ Remember the stock market must be viewed as a medium to long-term investment – that is for at least five years.

■ If the market plunges, do not panic. Providing all the economic fundamentals are right and you have shares in good companies, all will hopefully come right in the end.

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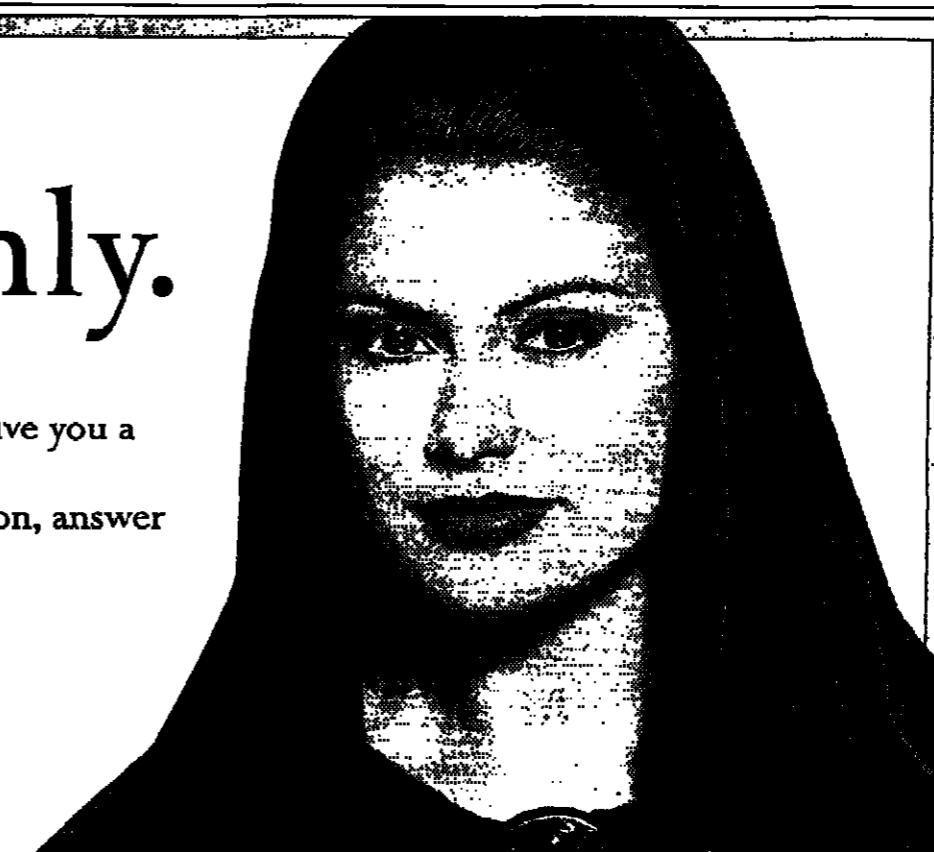
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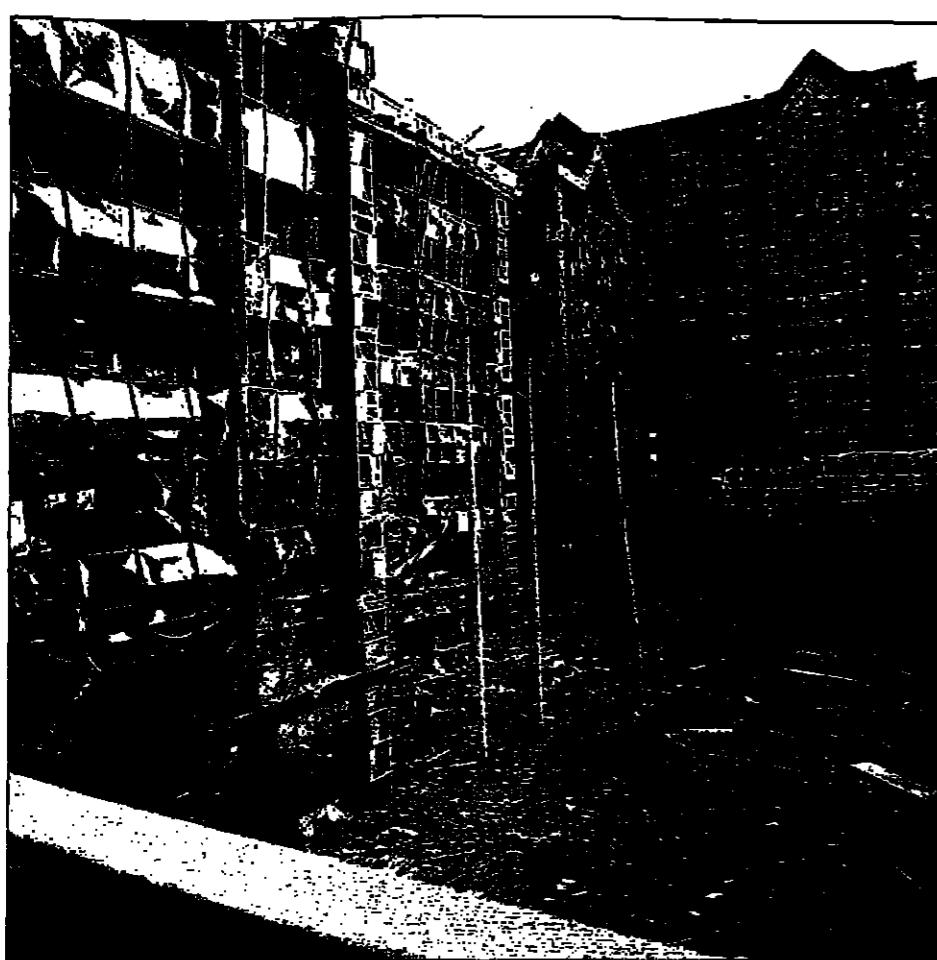
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When the Docklands, London, was bombed in 1996, many flat-owners were uninsured

The price of protection against terrorist damage

Changes by insurers after IRA bombs in the City of London have left tenants liable for terrorist damage. Paul Slade reports

As the Northern Ireland peace talks lurch from optimism to cynicism to despair and back again, one forgotten element of the process is that of how to insure against the damaging effects of another UK mainland bombing campaign in the event of a breakdown in the talks.

Among those most affected are the new and fashionable breed of inner-city dwellers drawn to live in converted offices and warehouses. In some

cases, they may even be living in blocks which still contain shops or offices. If so, they could drastically cut the cost of covering their home against the risk of terrorism.

Premiums for this type of cover on commercial premises soared in 1992, when the St Mary Axe bomb in the City of London led European re-insurers to rethink their view on terrorist risk in the UK. When another City explosion caused a further £1bn-plus of damage in 1993, they said they would no longer accept the risk passed on by UK insurance companies for terrorist damage.

UK insurers were forced to create their own reinsurer, Pool Re, instead. Terrorism premiums now go to Pool Re which, at the end of 1996, had amassed a fund of about £700m to meet future claims.

Until 1992, terrorist damage was included in mainstream commercial property insurance. But, under the new system, only £100,000 per property is covered. Pool Re cut its rates by 20 per cent in the riskiest areas at the beginning of this year, reflecting a claim-free year. But getting cover for a building's full value still means paying a hefty extra premium.

Philip Perry is terrorism underwriter at Hiscox which runs a number of Lloyd's syndicates operating outside the Pool Re system. He says: "If you take a big commercial property in London worth £100m, and insure it for fire perils, you might pay a premium of £30,000 or £40,000. The terrorism cover will cost you another £115,000. Previously, you, as a client, had that cover for free, because it was within the £30,000."

Perry's example refers to Pool Re's standard premiums for commercial property in the highest-risk areas of central London. Residential rates in the same areas would mean paying just £8,000. Both figures are before insurance premium tax.

This leaves leaseholders in a vulnerable position. The freeholders who own residential or mixed blocks will typically buy cover for the whole block and pass it on piece by piece to individual tenants.

"Both those buildings sustained very substantial damage. I think the temptation is there to save money, and people have to weigh up the risks."

But what happens if you are a leaseholder living in an uninsured property which is damaged as a result of terrorism? The position will depend partly on the details of your own lease. If the lease contains a covenant stating the landlord will take out insurance, you may be able to insist he reimburse you for any damage from his own pocket.

Equally, however, the lease may contain a clause saying you will take insurance for your own part of the block. If you have not done so, it may be the landlord who is pursuing you.

Homeowners are not affected by the 1992 changes. In their case terrorism cover is still included in their basic house and contents policy.

Thomsett is a trenchant critic of the whole system of terrorism insurance here, which he believes is far more tortuous than it need be. He says: "You walk down a street in SW1, and you can't tell from the outside whether it's commercial offices or a residential house. A bomb doesn't identify the residential bits as being less bombable, so the whole thing's a nonsense, really."

Leslie Lucas, chief executive

WHICH YOU ARE MOST LIKELY TO GET BLOWN UP

Commercial insurance rates for terrorist damage are higher than residential ones because these are the properties thought to be the principal targets. But any city centre now will contain a complex mix of commercial and residential properties, putting the residential ones at risk too. The danger is highest in central London, followed by outlying districts of London and the central business areas of other major cities. Except for the big cities there, Scotland, Wales, Devon and Cornwall are the safest part of the UK. Pool Re divides the country by postcode into four groups, the riskiest of which is zone A. Zone A consists entirely of central London postcodes, which are E1, E14, EC1, EC2, EC3, EC4, SE1, SW1, W1, W2, and WC2.

Of course, as Manchester residents are in a position to testify, London is not the only area potentially liable to attack in the event of a resumption of hostilities by the Provisional IRA or any other Irish republican organisation. It may be small comfort to them after suffering several hundred million pounds' worth of damage in 1996, but at least they are placed in a cheaper insurance risk category and would have to pay marginally smaller premiums to cover themselves against another terrorist outrage.

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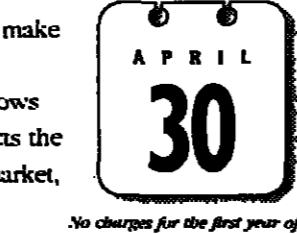
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مكتبة الأهل

7/PEP SURVEY

Balancing risk and reward

Making tax savings is pointless if you lose money on the underlying investment as a result. Tony Lyons reports

Before deciding which PEP to invest in, you should make sure that you understand the risks involved. No one should buy a PEP just because of the tax advantages.

PEPs are suitable for taxpayers who have enough capital, or who can save regular amounts, which can place at some degree of risk by investing in equities – whether directly in shares or indirectly, through a collective fund such as an investment or unit trust.

In order to make real gains, you must be prepared to invest for at least five years. According to Jane Drew of Fidelity Investments: "Investors need to understand the relationship between risk and reward in order to make sensible investment choices." In other words, the higher the potential return, the greater the risks. When it comes to equities and other high risk investments, be prepared to make losses as well as gains.

The lowest-risk investments are cash and near-cash fixed interest accounts, such as those offered by the banks and building



societies. More risky are bonds, then come equities, with collective investments being less of a risk than going directly into shares. This is because unit or investment trusts provide you with widely diversified portfolios.

Share prices are determined by many factors, including the health of the economy. Ultimately, if there are more buyers than sellers, prices will rise.

Most investors will be happier with a PEP that invests in a collective fund. But even here there are ways of reducing risk. All PEP brochures now show the degree of risk attached to any particular investment. Lowest of all are protected funds that guarantee you will at least get back your original capital after five or six years. These are followed by tracker funds which simply mirror the performance of a chosen stock market index, usually the FTSE 100 or FTSE All Share.

After these come more actively managed funds. Balanced UK-investing funds, along with managed funds, are generally seen as being lower risk than growth funds. On the scale of

risks, then come international funds. European and US specialist funds, smaller company funds, until you get to the really high-risk end of the spectrum of the emerging markets.

Even after deciding what degree of risk you are prepared to take, it can pay to look at the volatility of a particular fund. This is a statistical device for highlighting the degree of variation in a fund's unit price from the average – "the relationship between the price

movements of an investment and its benchmark index", says Ms Drew. The more volatile a fund, the more its unit price fluctuates. This is a statistical way of measuring how the price at any time deviates from its average price, usually over a one or three-year period. An historic guide only, a highly volatile unit price does not necessarily imply a bad investment. It just means that, at any given time, its price could vary widely from the sector average.

"We generally look at six time periods at least," says Chris Hardy of Reuters Funds, who provide statistical analysis. These measures of volatility are sometimes available in specialist magazines such as *Money Management*. "However, if you go back too far, it can become irrelevant," warns Mr Hardy. "Over time, many funds change or amend their investment aims. This sort of analysis is only for the professional adviser or very sophisticated investor."

so are unlikely to see sudden dramatic increases in value.

Among unit trusts, the best international funds have been the highly specialised ones that invest in a particular sector of the stock market, most notably Framlington Financial and Save & Prosper's Financial Securities fund, which both invest across the world's banks, life assureds and investment houses.

Also look at performance tables to get a "feel" for a management house's pedigree. The "holy quartet" of Fidelity, Jupiter, Perpetual and Schroder are often recommended because their funds have provided above-average returns across many sectors.

Juliet Oxborrow is editor of *What PEP*.

The best guide to future performance

The most lucrative place to put your PEP cash five years ago was an investment trust little known to private investors called Scottish National. By the beginning of 1998, a £6,000 five-year PEP investment in the capital shares of Scottish National, managed by Gartmore, was worth a staggering £33,700. Sadly, the trust is to be wound up later this year and shares are no longer available, although a successor trust has been created.

Even if shares in the original trust were still available, it is unlikely that they could repeat this dramatic appreciation, which was largely the result of the trust's structure. But that's the danger of looking at past returns to see which are the most promising investment prospects.

Past success is no guarantee of future returns, but performance tables can still yield useful information. Juliet Oxborrow explains

they tell you of performance that has already passed.

However, past performance can point to important trends in the stock market. For example, continental European unit trusts have now come powerfully to the fore, returning on average 22 per cent growth in the year to 1 March. Top performers, like the Newton European, have grown by more than a third over the past 12 months. Financial advisers believe this growth will continue.

It is also worth looking at the laggards in the market as they may be due for a change in fortune. Some investment houses,

notably Schroder, argue that smaller company funds are also ripe for a re-rating, having been left out of the stock market rally of the last two years.

If you are a cautious investor, pick a widely spread international fund which can chop and change between markets to scoop up the best growth. Some of the largest and oldest investment trusts are internationally invested, including the Foreign & Colonial trust and the Witton trust, managed by Henderson. These are highly venerated trusts whose shares are constantly in demand and

tunes. Japan is tipped for recovery and, even if this again proves to be a false dawn, at least it is currently very cheap to invest in. However, as a non-European fund, it can only account for a maximum of £1,500 of your general PEP allowance.

Rather than looking at investment funds in isolation, look at them in the context of other funds in the same areas to see how they have performed relative to their peers. Managers who can contain losses in a falling market should have the skills to outperform in a rising market.

Some investment houses,

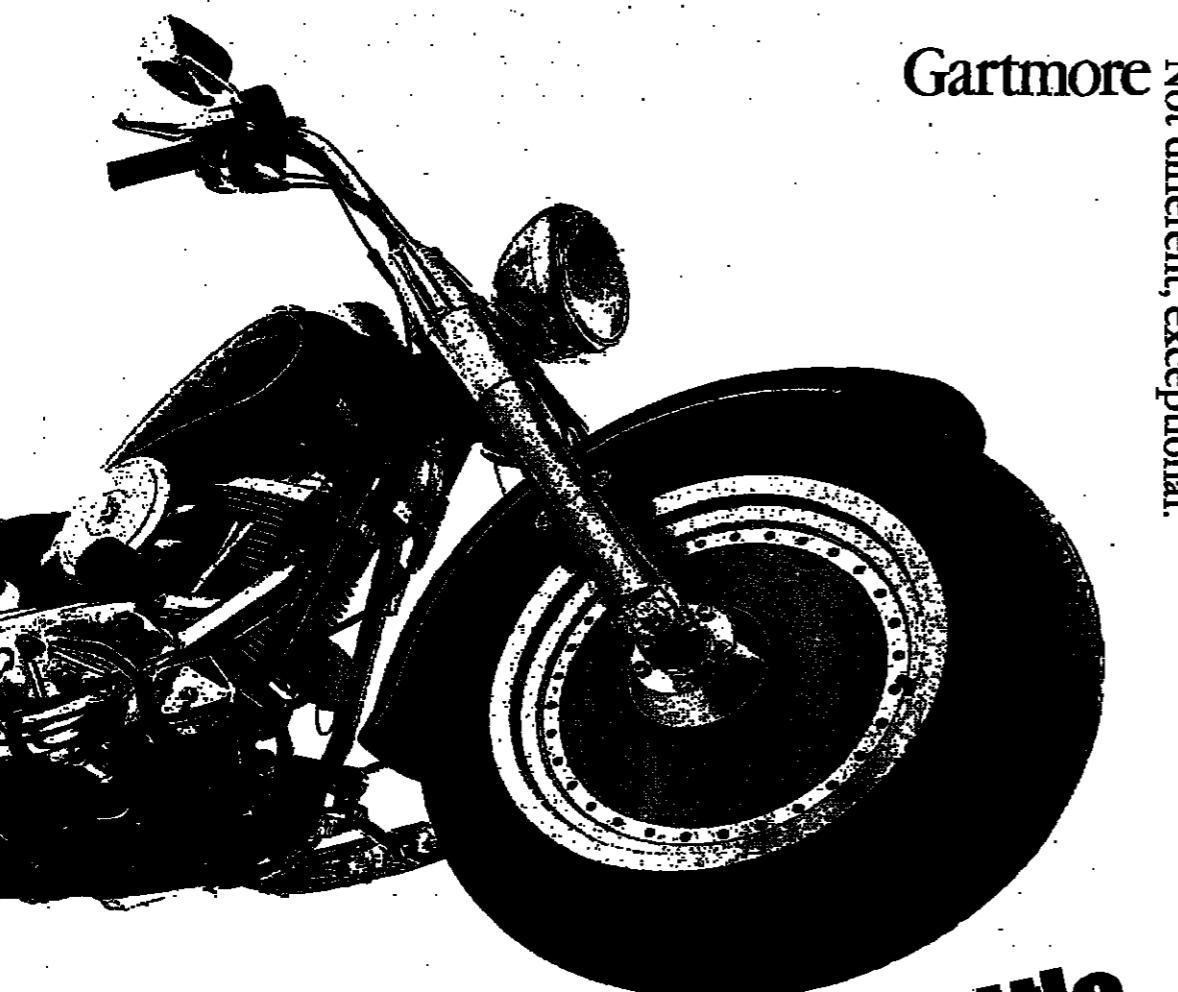
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Source: Standard & Poor's Micropal. Offer to sell means income unvested on 2nd March 1998. *1st means top quartile performance over 5 years in the individual Standard & Poor's Micropal section in the case of UK Capital Growth and International Growth since launch on 1st October 1990 for an initial investment of £1,000. This will be increased from £1,000 to £1,500 to accept further contributions, however this can contribute to the risk of the fund with the same risk characteristics. A 10% tax credit on all dividend distributions will be available up to 5 April 2003. The value of capital can affect dividends and distributions. If you have any questions about your tax position you should seek professional advice. *2nd quartile means the top 50% of funds in the same category. Conditions before investing: The value of investments and the income from them may fluctuate and can suffer from volatility. Returns are not guaranteed. Past performance is not a guide to future performance. 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Moral money making

More and more unit trust PEPs are adhering to ethical codes when they invest. By Tony Bonsignore

Many people feel uneasy about the manner in which their investments actually deliver a return. The usual concerns centre on where the money is being invested, such as companies that damage the environment, tobacco firms, weapons manufacturers or whether products are tested on animals.

It is often too difficult to ensure that your hard-earned cash is being invested with the best of intentions. Complex legal requirements mean that it can often be hard to find out exactly where all your money is

going. Even if you are able to find this information it can be a difficult and time-consuming process to check that each company listed lives up to the required standards. And, even then, can an investor be sure that any particular company does not have links with another firm that may not be as clean as it might be?

Fortunately, many investment companies have reacted to this demand with the launch of a range of ethical unit trust PEPs. This type of fund has become increasingly popular. Ethical funds only invest in firms which adhere to a strict ethical code. They often spend large sums of money looking into the activities of a particular firm for fear of picking one bad apple and alienating thousands of their own investors.

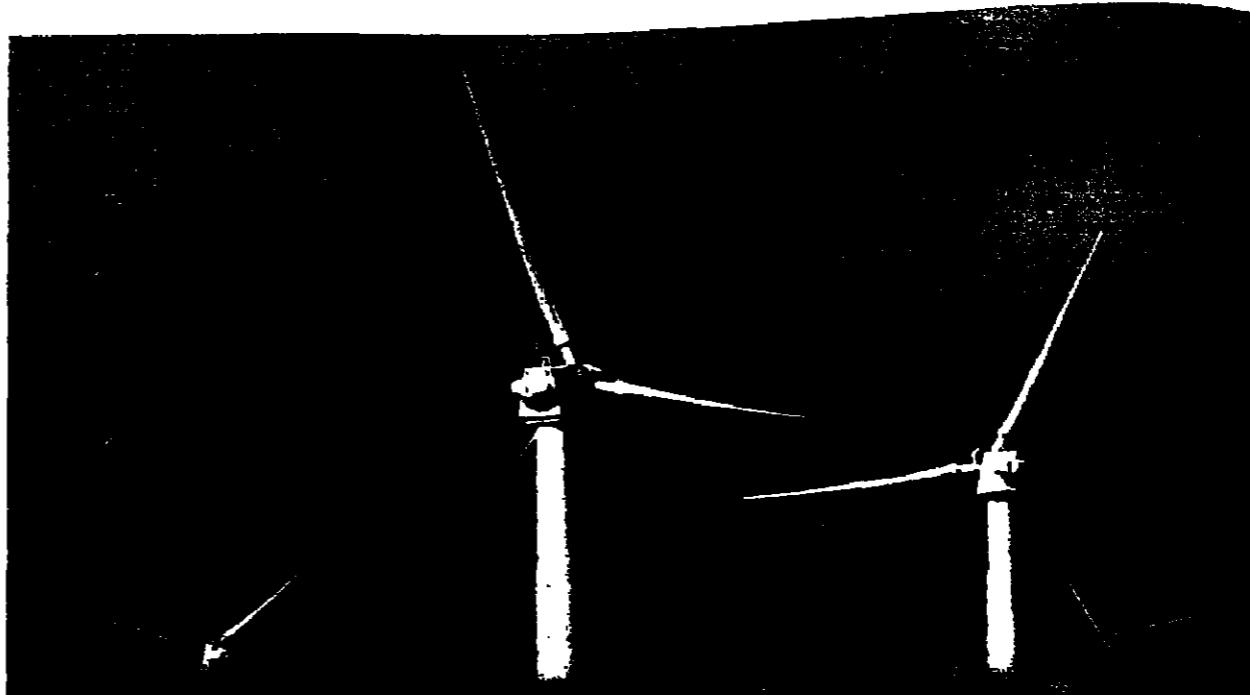
The market in ethical unit trusts is becoming quite large. There are now 24 unit trusts which could be classed as ethical, compared with only 17 just

one year ago. The amount of money invested in these funds has grown massively. By the end of last month there was more than £1.5bn invested in ethical unit trusts, compared with under £830m at the same time in 1997.

Most of the ethical funds are now available to PEP investors. Providers that offer ethical PEPs include such household names as Equitable Life, NPI, Scottish Equitable, Standard Life and Friends Provident.

The latter's Stewardship fund is far and away the market leader, with over £440m under management. The Enviro unit trust, run by Co-operative Insurance Services, is the only other unit trust with more than £100m of investments.

The ethical funds currently available come in a number of different forms. Some, such as the Stewardship fund, refuse to invest in anything it considers to be unethical while others, such as the Jupiter ecology



Generating profits: Seven out of 17 ethical funds have outperformed the average for all unit trusts over five years

the average UK unit trust over the same period. Seven of the 17 ethical unit trusts which have been going for five years or more have outperformed the average for all unit trusts.

So if you are considering investing some money but your

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Tony Bonsignore writes for 'Financial Adviser'.

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Reasons to climb aboard the last PEP bandwagon

After fear cometh the rejoicing. This week's announcement by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, that all investments in PEPs will retain their tax-free status even after the new Individual Savings Account comes into being in April next year means a fantastic last-minute opportunity for savers.

Even so, if recent financial surveys are to be believed, the majority of the British public is still unsure of the benefits of PEPs, what the rules governing investment into them are and how to go about finding a good PEP provider. Many of these issues are discussed in more depth in our survey. Here are the answers to some key questions about PEPs.

A PEP is basically a tax-free wrapper which can be placed around certain types of investments, such as shares, unit trusts and investment trusts. Any income or gains from PEP investments are tax free, and over the years these tax benefits can be worth hundreds of pounds.

You can invest up to £6,000 a year in a general PEP and you must invest through a PEP manager. You can only have one general PEP per year, although it is possible to transfer of one PEP and into another during the same year.

A general PEP can be managed or self-select. With a managed PEP, the PEP manager makes all the investment decisions for you. With a self-select PEP you decide what invest-

ments are in your PEP and you manage them. The vast majority of investors are better off spreading their risk and investing in a whole range of shares - this way you are not relying on just one or two companies to do well.

The best way to do this is through a collective investment such as a unit trust or investment trust. With these investments your money is pooled with money from hundreds of other investors and used to buy shares in a whole range of companies across many industries. The funds are run by experienced investment managers who can make expert decisions on which companies to invest in.

Many unit trust and investment trust houses act as PEP managers and offer access to their funds through a PEP. Competition is such that it is cheaper to invest in a fund via a PEP than to invest directly.

Unit trust PEPs are the most common. You buy units in the trust, each of which reflects the actual value of your share in the underlying assets in the fund. When you want to cash in your investment, you simply sell the units back to the fund manager. Unit trust man-

agers charge an initial fee and an annual fee for managing the fund to cover research and dealing costs, plus commission to whoever sold you the plan.

Investment trusts work in much the same way as unit trusts, except you buy shares rather than units in the fund and these are quoted on the Stock Exchange. This means the price of investment trust shares is determined by demand and supply for the shares rather than simply mirroring the value of the underlying assets in the fund.

When an investment trust's shares are quoted at less than the actual value of the underlying assets in the fund, the trust is said to be trading at a discount. Where the reverse occurs, the shares are said to be trading at a premium.

"Currently, the average investment trust is trading at a discount of 12 per cent," says Annabel Brodie-Smith of the Association of Investment Trust Companies (AITC).

"This means the investor can buy 100p worth of assets for only 88p. However, you must then look at the other important indicators like past performance, price history, the track record of the manage-

ment and the investment policy of the trust."

The investment trust industry has begun taking steps to narrow discounts. If this works and investment trust share prices start to rise to more closely reflect the underlying value of their assets, investors clearly will benefit.

If you are interested in investing in investment trust shares but are worried you may choose a fund that performs poorly, many investment houses, including Exeter Fund Managers, Gartmore, and Henderson now offer the option of spreading risk by investing in a wider range of their PEPable funds.

For those who like the idea of spreading their PEP investment over a range of funds, but would prefer to invest in unit trusts rather than investment trusts, it is worth considering a "fund of funds". These buy units in a whole range of unit trusts, usually managed by the same investment house, so diluting the risk of being invested in just one unit trust

which turns out to be a poor performer.

"But while there is no danger of these funds being the worst performers, they will also never be top of the pops either," points out Don Clark, managing director of Wolverhampton-based independent financial advisers, Thorquil Clark. "These unit trusts give greater diversity but they also can be a recipe for mediocrity," he warns.

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Sources: Scottish Widows. Returns on 1 November 1997 on a regular saving amount of £50 a month from November 1987 to October 1997 inclusive. Returns to a man aged 24 for the 10 year cash option value of a similar plan to the Premier Savings Plan. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to the future. With profits maturity and surrender values cannot be guaranteed in advance. The information given here is based on Scottish Widows' understanding of current tax law and Inland Revenue practice - these may change in future.

PEP NEWS IN BRIEF

The Government's decision on ISAs (see our front-page story), removes fears by many fund managers that the cost of transferring their existing PEPs into ISAs could reach hundreds of millions of pounds.

It also paves the way for sales bonanza in which PEP providers will compete to sell PEPs until the April 1999 deadline. Watch out for low-cost bargains in the coming months as the market heats up. But don't buy just on price alone: your PEPs, once bought, will probably remain invested for many years. Research the market and choose on performance too.

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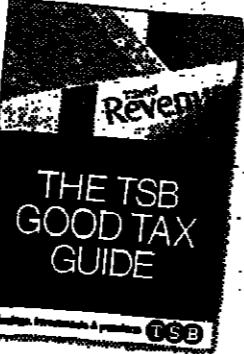
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Geared up for income

Returns on corporate bonds are higher, and risks lower, than equity investments. Simon Read looks at how the youngest member of the PEP family can suit nervous investors

Corporate bond PEPs are the youngest of the PEP range, having been introduced in July 1995. They represent an ideal way to generate a decent income. On top of that, corporate bonds are seen as safer investments than more traditional general PEPs.

Corporate bond PEPs represent a lower risk because they invest in fixed-interest bonds and other securities, such as convertibles and preference shares.

But a lower risk doesn't mean no risk. Corporate bonds are fixed-interest bonds issued by companies to raise money. The companies pay interest on their bonds and repay the capital later on a pre-set date.

If a company goes bust, however, your loan is unlikely to be repaid. In practice, this is unlikely to happen because only blue-chip companies issue corporate bonds.

There is a wide choice of corporate bond PEPs, but what they all have in common is that they are set up to generate income.

Convertibles are used by some managers. They too offer a fixed rate of interest, but they also offer investors the chance to convert their option into shares. For that

reason they offer lower returns than corporate bonds. But they do offer the extra potential of enjoying the capital growth associated with equities.

Convertibles have, therefore, often been more heavily promoted as a relatively low-risk entry into the equity market.

Both corporate bonds and convertibles are seldom invested in directly by private individuals. Investors can use the specialist unit trusts on offer from fund managers. It's a game worth playing as yields, the return you get, can be much greater with corporate bonds at 7.8 per cent, compared with 3.4 per cent with equities.

Additionally, corporate bonds are less risky than ordinary shares in that if a company goes bust, corporate bondholders will be paid out before ordinary shareholders. But the risk of losing out is still possible.

There are often two yields quoted on corporate bond PEPs, the "running yield" and the "gross redemption yield".

The first relates to the current estimated level of income you'll get from the fund, but this can be misleading because it takes

no account of any capital gains or losses. The notion of capital rising or falling in this type of investment may seem confusing, but that's because while there may be fixed interest on offer, there is no guarantee on capital. Bond prices vary according to the prevailing market conditions and the timing of buying and selling bonds can affect the return.

Gross redemption yield in fact gives a better indication of the return on your investment in a corporate bond PEP as it takes into account gains or losses on capital, as well as income. Comparing the redemption yield with the running yield may, in fact, reveal that the gross return of the fund may fall over time, particularly if the running yield is much higher.

How to choose? Obviously, the yield is something to consider but charges should also be taken into account. This is because they have a much greater effect on corporate bond PEPs than general PEPs because your capital is unlikely to be growing. High charges will therefore erode your capital quite quickly whereas in an equity-linked PEP, the growth should offset the charges effect.

Pick and mix portfolios

Self-select personal equity plans (PEPs) are for investors prepared to make the final decision about what to invest in via their PEPs. This might be individual shares or a choice of unit or investment trusts. But you must feel confident about making your own investment decisions.

Equally though, that doesn't mean you have to be an expert. Gavin Oldham of The Share Centre, one of the many brokers to offer self-select plans, says: "We feel they are suitable for most investors." He reckons that, unless you're a total beginner, a self-select PEP could be useful as long as you are prepared to take at least some advice on your investments.

Not least, this is because self-select PEPs offer more flexibility than managed funds. If you invest in a PEP from one of the big unit or investment trust providers, it can be difficult to switch out of the fund you choose, especially if you want to

move to another PEP manager. But a self-select PEP lets you change the investments you hold whenever you want.

Self-select plans are also often cheaper than managed PEPs. Initial charges are rare, though you may have to pay a set-up fee of perhaps, £50. Annual charges are levied in different ways but are not likely to add up to more than 1 per cent of the value of your portfolio, particularly if you hold shares directly rather than through unit and investment trusts.

But even if you use your self-select PEP to hold funds, it often works out cheaper than investing via a managed PEP. Do remember there are dealing charges. If you deal often, these fees mount up. Expect to pay between 0.75 and 1.5 per cent of the value of your deal on sales and purchases worth up to £10,000, more if you want advice.

Ian Millward of independent financial adviser Chase de Vere

disagrees with Gavin Oldham.

"Self-select plans are really only for sophisticated investors," he maintains.

Most self-select PEP providers are stockbrokers who will deal on your behalf on an execution-only basis, without advice, or with investment advice. Some only offer execution-only services. The Association of Private Client Investment Managers and Stockbrokers will supply you with details of all brokers offering self-select PEPs.

David Prosser is features editor of Investors Chronicle.

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Off-plan can be perilous

You may escape damp rot, but buying sight unseen still has its pitfalls, writes Penny Jackson.

In the past few years, British buyers have warmed to the idea of buying in new developments from plan. Not only can they choose exactly what they want but, in a rising market, sit back and watch its value grow while it is being built.

It all sounds so simple, far less trouble than worrying about damp rot, settlement and unscrupulous vendors. But at least the second-hand market is the devil we know. While we may rail against certain aspects of buying and selling, the property is there to be seen and we are familiar with the procedures and the role of estate agents, solicitors and surveyors. When it comes to buying off plan, though, the questions that need to be asked are very different.

The intense marketing of some new developments only serves to further cloud people's minds to the pertinent issues and Linda Beaney of Beaney Pearce, a firm of solicitors, has real concerns about how ill-prepared some buyers are. "They are likely to have spent more time on the small print of their holiday brochures," she says.

In London, particularly, the shortage of good property has fuelled the rush to buy off-plan. In a document for prospective buyers, Beaney Pearce runs through a list of how to proceed - sensibly.

Crucial is the warning not to be panicked into buying by the crush of people

apparently making speedy transactions. It is necessary only to recall scenes at developments such as County Hall in London to know how a carefully orchestrated marketing campaign can create queues and a panic among potential buyers fearful of losing an apartment.

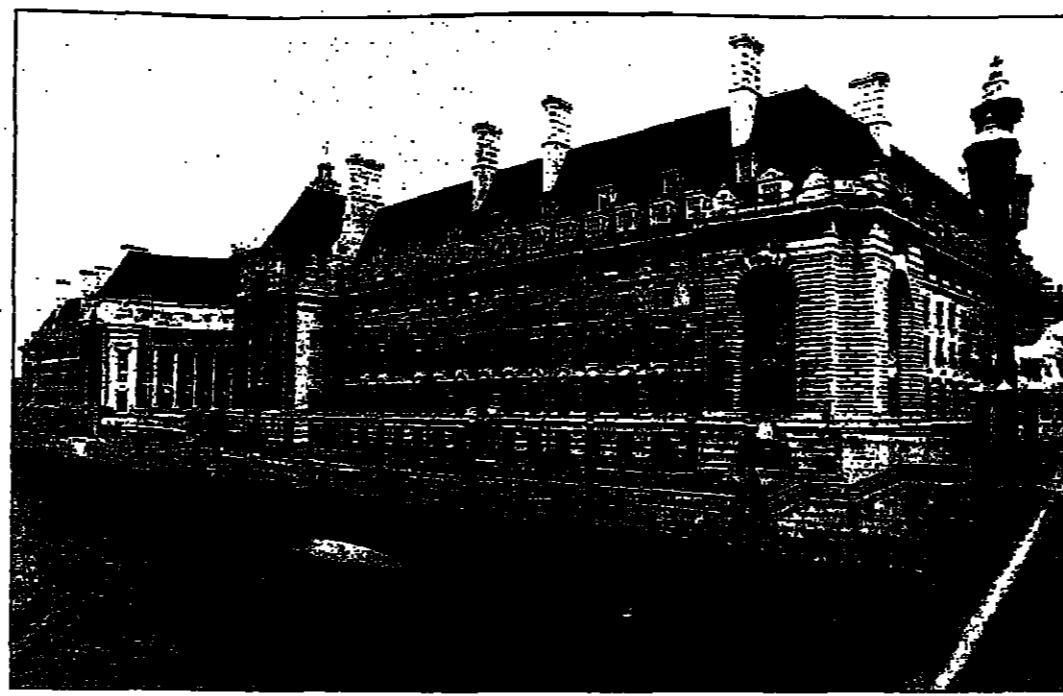
Buyers might even have exchanged contracts on the spot. The frenetic atmosphere can also persuade those who arrive at launches with their finances in place to overstretch themselves. Once the few well advertised and very attractively priced units go, it's on to normal prices.

"I have seen people spend £20,000 more than they intended to, as though it were £20," says Tom Marshall of Chutons. In order to speed things along, buyers in larger developments will often find a panel of solicitors and surveyors. When it comes to buying off plan, though, the questions that need to be asked are very different.

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Crucial is the warning not to be panicked into buying by the crush of people



County Hall in London was the scene of queues and panic among potential flat-buyers

recognises that for the panel of solicitors on a take it or leave it basis, explains Mr Foulser.

"What I consider grossly unfair is that despite all the fancy marketing, floor plans, and specifications, when the contracts arrive there is a clause which says the buyer cannot place any legal reliance on anything said to him by anyone other than the developer's solicitor. Plans and sales brochures are provided for information only. If you want to inspect the plans you might have to drive miles to the head office. What is going to do that?" he asks.

One of David Foulser's clients recently refused to exchange when the developer's solicitor would not confirm a particular point. "It is madness. Most people would have caved in because they are desperate not to lose the property. Developers sell property on the terms they dictate."

In London, Point West, the contractor

verted air terminal in Cromwell Road

that went through rocky times during the recession with buyers losing their deposits, is being sold heavily this weekend. Some 126 flats are for sale and the sales office confirms that a building society and solicitors will be available. Nobody, they say, will be pushed to use them. So why are they invited in by developers? Edward Lewis of FPD Savills says it is easier if the solicitors have approved the form of the contract and understand the issues. If they are potentially going to be instructed on some 25 per cent of sales they can work for a more competitive fee. "All the potential problems should have been ironed out."

That may well be the case. But it wouldn't do any harm for those buying off-plan to be as rigorous about the standards of their property investment as they are about their holiday hotel.



PENNY JACKSON

Miras was ripe for the picking

If there was general rejoicing that mortgage interest relief (Miras) was not to be cut after all, it was a muted affair. If ever there was a plum for the Treasury to pick this was it, since everybody had prepared themselves for its demise.

The rising value of property and higher income levels have outstripped the usefulness of the tax relief of 15 per cent on the first £30,000, which falls to 10 per cent in April. Could not the £3m saved be better spent on those in housing need?

The Council of Mortgage Lenders believes that housing expenditure has to be looked at as a whole. Miras is of most importance in areas with low property values, according to Sue Anderson for the Council.

So perhaps it is all a matter of timing. If interest rates head downwards, at 5 per cent, it would mean about £12 to £13 a month to the average household budget.

What better opportunity could there be to sweep it away altogether.

A flurry of activity has followed the increase in stamp duty from 1.5 to 2 per cent on property above £250,000 and from 2 to 3 per cent on homes over £500,000. If buyers can rush things through by Tuesday, they could save themselves £5,000.

Richard Donnell of FPD Savills does not expect it to have a marked effect at the top of the market. Some buyers may hesitate, but those on tight budgets are more likely to hold back on things like renovation work. Winkworth, the London agents, find that of their properties for sale, some 45 per cent are priced in excess of £250,000. The national figure is about 2 per cent. They expect to see more properties joining the 11 they already have for sale at either £249,000 or £249,950.

Don't give up the day job - if you want a mortgage

The self-employed face discrimination when buying property, reports Ginetta Vedrickas.

the newly entrepreneurial can irritate: "They come in, they've only been self-employed for four months and they wonder why building societies won't lend them the money. They make you laugh."

Liz Godwin knows the pressures facing freelancers more than most. A compulsive mover, six times in two years, she has resorted to a "non-status" mortgage for

each purchase. This type of loan caters for borrowers unable to supply adequate proof of income or with poor credit ratings. Lenders protect themselves by asking for a higher deposit and charging higher interest rates.

Liz is a successful, established artist and currently borrows from the Bank of Scotland. Surely she qualifies for a mortgage with favourable rates? "I've tried but it was so much hassle I gave up. It seems much easier just to get my accountant to send a letter basically saying I'm good for the loan."

In addition to unfavourable interest rates, freelancers can face accountancy bills of several hundred pounds.

Most lenders deny discrimination but the evidence suggest the contrary. Salaried bor-

rowers must prove their income for the last six months but self-employed applicants are frequently asked for two to three years' accounts plus a projection of their next year's earnings.

This can seriously hinder the amount they can borrow, particularly if their business is new. But could the self-employed do more to help themselves? One agent claimed that they have only themselves to blame: "They spend years trying to dodge paying tax so when they try to get a mortgage it hits them hard. On paper they're virtually on income support yet it's obvious they are rolling in it."

Richard Turnbull, mortgage broker for Patrick Knight, is more sympathetic. He has just received a call from Northern Rock re-

fusing a mortgage for David, a freelance sub-editor and Karen, a supply teacher. "It seems extremely unfair," says Richard. "They are highly experienced, professional people who choose to freelance. They have excellent credit ratings and a large deposit."

David and Karen have rented for almost three years and recently decided to buy a flat in London. Through their broker they applied for a mortgage from Northern Rock with a rate fixed at 5.99 per cent for 5 years. The "unbeatable" deal is for borrowers with a minimum deposit of 25 per cent, a requirement that David and Karen fulfil, yet they were refused.

What do they think of Northern Rock's attitude? "I think it's a bit 1950s," says David. "They are entitled to their opinion

but had they asked our landlord they would find that we have never once been late with the rent and we're not likely to default on our mortgage payments."

Northern Rock says it treats self-employed applicants equitably and considers all cases individually. But a spokesperson cautions: "Our criteria is not just to safeguard the lender but the borrower, too. If we refuse a mortgage application we're doing the customer a favour. Perhaps they are overstretching themselves and should look again."

Some lenders say they are making greater efforts in what many admit is a market in which they are less pro-active.

Richard Turnbull believes that slowly changing attitudes are not keeping pace with his changing clientele: "In the current market more people than ever are taking a positive decision to give up their salaried jobs and strike out on their own, so we need more flexibility from borrowers."

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